

2012 Youth Writing Contest

Second Place Winner: Lower Division (8th-9th Grade)

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Educator: Barry Weiner

Being treated differently because of a particular trait can be distasteful and is entirely unfair. In the midst of World War II, many people fled from camps, ghettos and hiding places to seek refuge in the woods. They wanted to join the partisans in order to resist the Nazis. Women partisans had to work much harder to be recognized, and their efforts were often not acknowledged. The concept that men worked to provide for their families and women should be at home caring for their children still exists today. Among the partisans, there was inequitable distribution of food, clothes and guns. In partisan groups that were completely composed of Jews, women were usually treated better. Most women partisans did not get to fight; they cooked, cleaned and provided medical care. Life was very difficult for women partisans.

Despite the hardship, some women overcame difficult obstacles to join the Resistance. Sara Fortis was born in the town of Chalkis, Greece. Sara was raised by her mother. They knew it was necessary to flee their town when Germans arrived and began deporting Jews to camps. Sara and her mother fled to another small village, but it quickly became unsafe. Her mother decided to stay and hide, but she wanted to fight. She went to many different towns to find young females who wanted to be a fighter. Slowly, she gathered a small group of thirteen women to fight as a squad among a larger group of Greek male partisans. She taught the women how to fight, and most importantly how to fight next to a man.

They left as little girls, but finished as accomplished women. After their first mission, they were recognized by the men. Women achieved respect. Thereafter, they regularly participated on missions. When Sara's squad was asked to do a mission, the men needed to ask Sara directly. Sara would reject them if they forgot her name¹. She said they must say Captain Sarika, the captain of the woman. She had respect for her name and for being a powerful woman leader. Some of the men didn't want to admit that a woman could be better for some missions. They had an advantage because they weren't suspected to do the 'heavy lifting' in a man's world. Sara and her squad didn't get credit for most of the missions they completed even if some men respected them. Sara became very concerned for her women's safety among the other male partisans and was worried about sexual misconduct. She tried her utmost to protect the women in her squad. Sara was arrested but was released after the war and moved to Israel where she lives today.

Sara Fortis is an important role model. The world needs to gain knowledge from past world events so that we never repeat the same mistakes again. We can learn from an individual's heroic actions, as well as from collective efforts. Partisans were people from many backgrounds who came together for one cause. Even though they were fighting against Nazis, there was still misogyny. Sara shows that you must speak up for your beliefs even if the society around you doesn't agree. Many people did courageous actions, but there was still discrimination among partisans. Everyone discriminates against something or someone even if it's hidden or a silly joke. Every person needs to work on understanding their own views and prejudices, and then try their best to fix this. We might have improved over the years, but there are still many flaws that can be corrected.

¹ If someone forgot her name, they would not be rejected, but merely called her "Captain". [Source](#).