

2012 Youth Writing Contest

Second Place Winner: Upper Division (10th-11th Grade)

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Educator: Robin Stanton

We walked in silence across the damp paths of the Lupochowo Forest. The journey my peers and I took mirrored that of the Jews in Tykocin, Poland. After we, like the Jews, participated in a lively service in the town's synagogue, our tour guides rounded us up and sent us on a bus to this mysterious forest only a few miles away. The Jews who experienced this same journey, almost 80 years ago, were abruptly rounded up and sent to this foreboding plot of land as well. However, this is where our stories took separate paths. We survived; they did not.

While the Jews of Tykocin were slaughtered and sent to mass graves in the Lupochowo Forest, this was not the case of all Jews during the years of the Holocaust. Throughout the Second World War, over 30,000 Jews¹, including thousands of women, fought the Nazi regime with armed resistance. These partisans, many of whom were stationed in the woods, fought with a "now or never" mentality. The women made up ten percent¹ of all resistance fighters. Although many of these women lived in fear, they would not hide, and they certainly would not be sent like sheep to the slaughter. These women were born to be fighters and would die as fighters.

Female partisans undertook a wide range of responsibilities during the war. Not only would they perform domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and nursing, but they would engage in reconnaissance missions, weapons transport, and even armed combat. According to former partisan Mira Shelub, their mission was "to interrupt and disrupt." Often, they would target strategic sites of their opposition and detonate them. If combat was necessary, they utilized guerrilla warfare. However, their most important objective would be to shake the confidence of the Third Reich.

What makes these women so admirable is not the physical destruction they caused or the number of lives they saved, but rather what they stood for. They advocated survival as a means of resistance. Even if these female partisans only represented a small faction of society, they showed that you don't need numbers to make a difference. If you believe that you can effect change, there is nothing that can stop you from this pursuit.

Even though I experienced the forests of Poland as a place of death, the female partisans brought them to life. Contemporary society can learn a great deal from these women. When I first heard of their plight, I immediately thought of the Zionist leader, Theodor Herzl. He once said, "If you will it, it is no dream." The female partisans were determined to fight for their survival. They lived the reality that many Jews of their time only dreamed of. Thus, it is imperative that today's society follows their example and stands up for what it believes in. Injustice pervades modern society far too often with forces such as racism and sexual discrimination. While physical violence may not be the answer to these problems, it is important we let those people, who partake in these behaviors, know that we will do whatever it takes to put an end to such bigotry. It does not matter how large the opposition may be or how few proponents of justice truly exist. Every person can make a difference and every person can make the world a better place. With this outlook, we can make sure that those who died in the Lupochowo Forest did not die in vain and that the legacy of the female partisans will always have a place in our hearts.

¹ Approximate number.