

## 2012 Youth Writing Contest

### Third Place Winner: Upper Division (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Grade)

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Educator: Donna Harrison

#### *That We May Be Remembered*

You were the innocent bystander, right? The one who listened, as somewhere down the hall, nasty threats were screamed into the ears of a terrified freshman. The one who observed, as the school bully threw punch after bloody punch because he knew that nobody would stop him. The one who “couldn’t” and didn’t do anything. Do you feel innocent, blameless, and guilt-free, you bystanders, you onlookers, you witnesses? Well let me tell you that there is nothing innocent about the choice you have made. By choosing to lay low, to stand back and allow hate crimes and threats to mar the lives of your peers, you allow the livelihood of the bully to perpetuate. You give in and, ultimately, you give up.

Perhaps you recall Nazi Germany; or maybe you do not. Were you there when World War II erupted and plunged our world into an era of destruction and death? I was not, but I believe that such a time of hate and fear still exists and has, in fact, been a part of our lives for longer than many of us care to admit. We hear it on the news every evening. We read it in every newspaper headline. Some of us have even witnessed it with our own eyes. It is hate, and it is pouring out of the mouths of bullies, raining from the eyes of victims, and flooding our entire world with its poison.

It will take special people to address the state of our world in this age. They must be courageous, driven individuals, whose sense of morality will not permit them to take the back seat while discrimination permeates our lives. It will take people like Sonia Orbuch and Vitka Kempner, whose incredible fortitude during a time of extreme violence offers all of us a model of perseverance and boldness. These women did not overlook the world of injustice that they lived in and opt to wait for someone else to stand up. They took the initiative, crossing both race and gender barriers to fight for their identity as Jewish women. Life in the partisans was a daily struggle, where women faced labor-intensive duties and the constant threat of attack. Despite the odds, these women prevailed, and now they tell their stories, inspiring a new generation of leaders.

We learn so much from them: that boundaries which attempt to pigeonhole us are meant to be pushed; that human dignity is something that must be secured for all people; and that courage in the face of despair is honorable.

What is the legacy which you hope to be remembered by upon leaving this life? Just as we admire the spirit of those in the partisans, generations of the future will look to their predecessors, us, for examples of bravery and confidence. They will venerate those who stood up to make a difference by halting hate and hostility, blocking bitterness and brutality. Let’s make sure that our actions serve to count us among the remembered.