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History of the Holocaust

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### Final Review Paper

Carol Fike: Recently I had a conversation with a few people that experienced the Holocaust in many different ways. A few of them experienced the life in a concentration camp, one hid, and another disguised himself as a person that he was not.

Let me introduce you to the people that I met with. The first was a man by the name of Solly Peril. Solly will you tell us what you did during the Holocaust?

Solly Perril: I fled to another country as many parents told me to do as the war began. I ended up attending a communist school in the Soviet Union until the school was attacked. Then he later became a German officer and a war hero who made it through the war being someone that he is not.

Carol Fike: The next was a man by the name of Wladyslaw Szpilman, will you also tell us what you did during the war.

Wladyslaw Szpilman: I started out in the Warsaw Ghetto, as the camp was being evacuated an old friend saved my life but my family marched on to there death at Treblinka camp. I managed to stay in the camp for a while but then one day while I was working I saw a friend, from before the war, on the outside and instantly decided that I wanted out. From this point on I jumped from one house to the next hiding to save my life waiting for the end of all this craziness.

Carol Fike: The next man was Vladek Spiegelmann, who lived through the camps. Is there anything that you would like to add Mr. Spiegelmann?

Vladek Spiegelmann: NO and I am unsure why you invited me to be here to waste money on my travel expenses and this food.

Carol Fike: And the youngest person that experienced the Holocaust out of the group was a man that experienced a concentration camp in Italy; at the time he was five years old. Which is obviously a different perspective told by Joshua Orefice.

Joshua Orefice: They came and took my father and I away from my birthday party. I had no idea where we were going, I was just mad that I did not get to eat any of my birthday cake. My dad kept telling me that we were on a trip that he had planned for us with my uncle. We arrived at the camp and dad told me that it was all a game and that if we got enough points than we would win a prize. I can remember hiding during the day waiting for dad to return. He would come in exhausted from a hard day of work and then give me all of his food.

Carol Fike: For a while we all just sat around and formally learned about one another because despite the fact that they all lived through the Holocaust, they had no idea who one another was. So now that we know what you did during the Holocaust to survive if you could go back and change anything would you?

Joshua Orefice: I do wish that I could go back in time and take better care of my father as much as he did for me. He did everything to keep me alive and I did nothing to save his life. All I did was make him tired and eat his food, he died because of me.

Carol Fike: I am sure that he is glad that you continued on his family name and I think that almost any father would have done anything that he could have to save his son.

Solly Perril: To be honest I am not sure what I could have done differently. I do however feel very guilty that I lied about who I was all through the war and having to hide who I really am so that the Germans would know who I really was.

Vladek Spiegelmann: You have no idea as to what it was like to be a Jew in the German world. The only way that you survived was to leave your identity behind and become this brand new person. You should have experienced the struggle with the rest of us, rather than leaving all that behind and helping the Germans.

I however saw death daily, flirted with death many times and I would not change what I did during the war. I stayed true to what I believed and never turned back, it was through organizing that I lived to see another day. Hey and Wladyslaw why did you begin the struggle with your family only to turn your back on them and let them die while you live.

Wladyslaw Szpilman: Don't tell me what I did was dishonest. I did not ask the Jewish army to pull me out of the line, I was ready to die with the rest of my family, in fact I tried to return to them but they were already out of my reach. And for your information my friend and I were the ones who began the planning of the Warsaw Ghetto Rebellion. And I remember watching this rebellion from my safe hiding place that was across the street. I remember saying to myself that I should have been there,

fighting the Germans as part of this Rebellion. But instead I sat and watched. I sat and watched as my family walked to their deaths and as my friends in the ghetto fought the Germans and died.

Vladek Spiegelmann: But they died doing it. How is that brave?

Carol Fike: Can we now fast forward a few years what happened to each of you as the war was ending and then what happened to you when you returned home?

Wladyslaw Szpilman: I can remember walking through the ruins of a town that I used to be a part of. I was searching for a place that had food and somewhere that they could not find me, and that I could survive in up until the end of the war. I can remember hiding in the upstairs of this house. I happened to go downstairs to find something and there he was a German officer. I thought for sure that my struggle up until this point would be good for nothing. We talked for a few minutes and then I played the piano, as I used to do, for him. He then left and I returned to my hiding place, I was careful now more than before that I only left my hiding place when I absolutely needed to. Then one day when the shots were getting closer the German officer returned to me this time he brought me food and a coat. I quickly put the coat on and ate the food that I was given. The officer told me that they were leaving town, and wished my luck. A day or so later I heard a tank coming into the town, I could tell that they were here to save me so I went running down the stairs. The only problem was that I was still wearing the German coat and for that reason they almost killed me but I managed to survive.

Solly Perril: My story is similar in the fact that they almost killed me because I was in the wrong uniform. At the time I was serving the Germans and I saw the Russians and since they had been nice to me in the past I ran to them. They did not believe me and took me to a camp that was closing down. When I arrived they gave a prisoner a gun and told him to shoot me. He probably would have but then I saw my brother and I ran to him. We both survived the remainder of the camp. Then together we traveled to Palestine, because we thought that it would be safer than returning to Germany.

Vladek Spiegelmann: See, that is what happens when you help or get help from the enemy you should have just stood on your own two feet and gone through the camp like everyone else. I remember being marched from Auschwitz to Germany. We walked for days and the weak ones died on this journey. But I kept going, knowing that soon I would be free to see my dear Anja again. After the long march we were free to go, it took days for me to return to Poland, for the fact that I had nothing with me to get the tickets that were needed. After I finally arrived I returned to my old house and found

people living there. But then I found Anja and not to long after we fled to the United States, because we thought that it might safer there.

Joshua Orefice: I can remember my father and I walking around the camp. We found a small cabinet and he told me to hide until there was no one around. He then went running off and I never saw him again. I waited like dad had told me when it became quiet I exited my safe place. I looked around and saw no one. Then I heard something that was coming my way. It was a tank with a United States soldier inside. HE gave me a ride down the road and then I saw my mom. We stopped the tank and I went running towards her. I was never so excited to see a familiar face.

Carol Fike: Alright, last question, do you feel like the Holocaust made you the person that you are today?

Vladek Spiegelmann: How can you go through something like this and not be a different person? I think that in many ways I am a different person. I have lost my wife and son and married another woman. I keep every crumb of food, I throw nothing away. For what I have is mine and no one will ever take that away from me.

Joshua Orefice: My mother and I returned to Italy and the rich life that we had known before the war. It helped that my mom was not Jewish but yet went through the camps with my father and I, that is what you call love.

Wladyslaw Szpilman: Now that the Holocaust has ended, I am back to playing my music on a Polish station just like I wanted to. Even though I did not experience the camps I saw so much suffering out my window. I feel as though it has taught me that every day is important, to never waste any food, and do something that you love. For me that is sitting at the piano bench playing my music.

Solly Perril: For those five years I had to be someone completely different from the true me. So that is what I have learned to stick to what I know and never forget who I am and what I have been through. I guess it takes death to learn how to live again.

Carol Fike: Thank you all for sharing your story with me today. I know that each of you went through a lot and I know that it is not easy to discuss such a hard time in a persons life. Thank you, again.

## Resources Used:

Solly Perril story was told in the film Europa, Europa

Wladyslaw Szpilman story was told in The Pianist

Vladek Spiegelmann story was told in Maus I and II

Joshua Orefice story was told in Life is Beautiful