

*Separation*  
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Teacher: Christina Zubko  
Survivor Testimony: Engelina Billauer

I click the play button on the video...

She speaks softly and blinks back tears to mask her sorrow when she relives the scarred memories of the past. In her testimony, Holocaust survivor Engelina Billauer sorrowfully reminisces of the brief moments of bliss in her childhood before her first account of the war:

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For me, “separation” was an unfamiliar word.

As a young girl, I was always with my parents who were disabled. With my elder brother and sister gone at work, I spent most of my time, not with the other neighborhood children outside, but with my parents at the synagogue. Many thought it to be tedious work, but I never minded.

So for us, “separation” was an unfamiliar word.

Especially during the times I spent with my mother when we went on walks and stopped by shop windows to admire the latest fashions, it was as if there was no such word. When my smiling mother grabbed my hand and hurried me home to throw open the closet and transform old dresses, there was no such word.

However, it seemed that the German guards were eager to introduce me to such an unforgiving word when they separated me from my parents.

It was late September 1942 when our family was deported. We were ultimately sent to Estonia where late at night we were all ordered off the train. The next morning our parents were put on a bus. My sister and I tried to stay with them, but we were commanded to get off the bus and clean the tracks of human waste.

They promised we would see our parents. Although their grim faces and rushed replies told a different story, we chose to believe them. Only moments after, when our parents were already gone, the twisted, heart-wrenching truth hit us: they were never coming back

And too early had the word “separation” entered my life.

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I press pause. Then, a moment of silence ensues. I look down at the scribbles and shorthand notes I had taken, but my mind remains blank.

While at school studying for World History exams, I regarded the Holocaust as an abstract event, almost as coldly as how the textbook dismissed emotions with a single printed number. While I had tried to fathom the staggering death toll of 6 million Jews, I had lost touch with the human emotions and elements of the Holocaust.

So whilst having these revelations cross my mind, I gripped my pen harder and drew angry, frustrated scribbles onto the paper, impressing marks and scars which have failed to capture Billauer’s tragic memories of separation.

And I realized this number of deaths did not just end with its numerical value, but behind each and every number were victims screaming stories and accounts of their experiences, most unfortunately left unspoken and unheard. However, because of Billauer and other survivors, their memories and voices transcend the depths of the Holocaust and rise above the flames of the crematoria. Their stories will echo on for generations to come: we must – we will - tell them forward.