

# 2015 CREATIVE ARTS STUDENT CONTEST

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LIBERATION: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED 70 YEARS LATER?

High School Writing – First Place

“The Guest Speaker Seventy Years After” by Yi Jian Ma

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“LIBERATION...LESSONS THROUGH THE DECADES”  
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Seventy years ago, I was liberated from the ghastly abyss commanded by the infamous Führer Adolf Hitler and his Nazis. During these 70 years, I made countless tries trying to suppress my memories of the unprecedented calamity of the Holocaust. These memories appear phantasmagoric, but I am in pain because I know they are no mere illusion. As much as I try, I cannot suppress the haunting memories of what I witnessed and survived more than seven decades ago in Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. I want to avoid speaking of the horrors that I lived.

On December 31st, the last day of the year, an acquaintance, an educator, made an unexpected visit to my house. He came to me and made a request for me to speak at his university. Having been living in silence in the hope of escaping from the knowledge of the cruel acts of which human beings were capable, my response was trepidation-I knew that accepting the speaking opportunity would send me back to Tartarus. I politely declined his offer, and he left.

A week later I received another visit from Mr. Amit. This time he refused to take “no” for an answer. With a sigh, I inquired of him, “Why do you want me to speak so badly when such memories would unleash an untamed beast that would haunt my soul? Surely as a friend you wouldn’t allow harm to impair this feeble old man but want let this old man spend his time decaying in peace.” My friend replied, “But my dear friend, it has been seventy years since the Holocaust! It would be an injustice to the world for your words to remain unheard! You can help the world with your words! Still unsure, I told my friend I will ponder his request and will give him an answer next week.

After he left, I decide to take a stroll outside in the starry night, hoping to clear my mind. With every step I took, my eyes would dart upward to the stars and bringing a sense of the past to mind. Then I saw a glimpse of Aquarius, the Water Bearer, in the sky reminding me of the very same sky I saw in Auschwitz. It was a reminder of the crimson river flowing out of Aquarius’s urn with my brethren lying on the ground and remains still for evermore. Suddenly, a teardrop emerged from my eye. This sadness, these abominable memories, and this feeling of

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unsatisfactory peace strike every part of my body, heart, and soul. I came to the realization that I could I could no longer remain silent.

The week went by and Mr. Amit had his answer. He was overwhelmed with joy. The event was scheduled for Tuesday, January the 27<sup>th</sup>. Coincidentally, it is also the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. I spent a whole week pondering upon my words unleashing pandemonium upon my aging mind. I picked up a pen, and began writing but the constant trembling of my hands was nonstop. Somehow, a speech emerged.

Day after day went by and January 27<sup>th</sup> finally arrived. Then, I began my tortuous walk to the stage of the auditorium. Once I arrived on the stage, I saw a thousand stares piercing my heart from the faces in the seats. Then a disturbing image of piles of skeletons with their empty eyes staring blankly at my terrified countenance appeared in my mind. With this haunting image in my mind, I begin my speech.

“Welcome ladies and gentlemen. I am Mr. Erza Sarid. I am a survivor of the most horrible event that occurred in history. Over half a million Gypsies, more than three million Soviet prisoners-of-war, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, Social Democrats, Communists, partisans, trade unionist, Polis intelligentsia, and over six million Jews were victims of the abominable genocide known as the Holocaust. The Holocaust was no mere event scribed in textbooks known as the “Final Solution” or the extermination, persecution, and annihilation of inferior humans or the so call “untermenschen”. Instead, it is a tempestuous beast enshrouded with malice that resides in every single human. Not knowing when the beast will break out of the cage or completely unaware of its existence, it is sleeping within us waiting for the opportune time to awaken!

My discovery of this beast began in 1941 in Frankfurt, Germany’, when I was twelve years old. It was bright and sunny Tuesday morning at school. My teacher said “Raise your hand if you are a Jude”. With a sense of pride and jubilant attitude of the Jewish heritage, I along with four other children raised our hands. What happened next was entirely unexpected. The teacher told us to go home and to never to come to school again. Then out of the windows of the

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classroom, my peers with whom I formerly shared meals, laughed with, and played with, yelled “Get out you stinking Juden. You rotten trash!” It was incredulous. I was stunned and utterly speechless. My former friends turned their backs to me. After that, things crumbled and went downhill rapidly. When I arrived home, it was bedlam. My parents were darting to and fro packing things in suitcase. I didn’t know why. Before I could ask why. BOOM! Our doors were broken down by a horde of Nazis in uniform with an armband displaying a swastika and pointing guns at my family and me.

I was horrified and aghast! The demeanors of my parents didn’t help. The color of their faces was drained. My parents’ hands were frightening cold as if they were already dead. A slight touch and their bodies would have collapsed into fragments. My father tried to remain composed, but he made a fatal mistake. He tackled the German soldier. Then a loud reverberation echoed through the air. A trigger was pulled. My father lay on the ground and blood was gushing out. His eyes were open and were blinking no more. He did not move. My father was dead. Two more times a loud reverberation echoed in the air. The same German soldier pulled the trigger two more times on my father. He knew my father was dead from the first shot, but the next two shots were out of delight and the sadistic part of the soldier. The reason I said “delight” was because his face was smiling and laughing as he pulled the trigger. There was no remorse. I was terrified. There were no words to describe how utterly terrified I was. It was a more devastating blow to my mother. As she embraced me, my shirt became wet and saturated with her tears. Without any sympathy, the German troops dragged my mother and me to an open truck and drove us to a train station where we would be deported to Auschwitz.

The train was packed with people. People were moving to and fro. I had fallen to the floor and lost sight of my mother. Fervently, I tried searching for her, but to no avail I did not find her. The train was too crowded for me to move. Then a foul stench of human wastes was in the air. Growing tired from my search and disgusted by the smell, I was able to find a spot to sit down and cried for the remainder of the journey to an unknown destination and unaware of what horror is about to come.

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Once I arrived in Auschwitz, my days of true hell began. First thing I observed were families separating, the mother and children away from their fathers. For me, my father was dead and mother was lost. I was alone. Then I along with other people, I undressed and my hair was shaved off, and my previous clothes replaced by a stripped uniform. The process eliminated any remnants of human dignity still in us. Then we were sent off to our barracks. Just like the train, the barracks were cramped. There were no sanitary facilities. The place was damp. Roofs were leaking, and a foul stench was in the air from people who were suffering from diarrhea. Another horror was that humans weren't the only species residing in the barracks. Various sorts of vermin and rats were wandering around as well.

The second day and every day after that in the concentration camp, everyone was sent to work. We spent about ten hours working, and the rest of the time was taken up by long roll-call assemblies, lining up for food rations, a place in the latrines, and removing dirt and pests from clothing. For those who can't work, death awaited them by a bullet to the head. I was weak, but I tried to survive. No matter how difficult the tasks were, I fought to survive. Then there were the gas chambers. Every day, I would see group of people entering chambers and never come back out again. Every day, I was scared that I might enter these lurid chambers. I knew not when I might get sent in. Every day was a never-ending tortuous struggle. Every day, I pray to my messiah for all of this to be over.

Finally on January 27, 1945, everything was over. Soviet Troops liberated Auschwitz. At first, I thought I was hallucinating. I was stunned. Alas, freedom arrived. From 1941 to 1945, my life was trapped in a despicable prison with the fear of death, yet somehow I have survived.

We are now seventy years after the end of the Holocaust, but what have we learned? It was an event that took the life of millions of people. It was an event with a disastrous effect. It was an event with a goal to annihilate, persecute, and exterminate the inferior species. Indeed, the Holocaust was all of that above. But most importantly ladies and gentlemen, the Holocaust is a lesson. It is a lesson of the heinous crimes that we humans, same species as the Nazi, are capable of performing. We are creatures capable of killing and hurting the lives of others for our

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own purposes. Whether through war, or fights, or arguments and disagreements, we can carry out abominable tasks by unleashing the tempestuous beast residing within us. Even today, the terrorist group, ISIS, is mass murdering innocent humans and causing havoc to the world. There was the genocide in Darfur in, the one in Rwanda in, the one in Bosnia, and the one in Cambodia. In the Ukraine, humans living a simple life are being killed in their own homes. Atrocities are being committed each day even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Now ladies and gentlemen, as a feeble old man, my words may or may not have a huge impact. Or to you all it may be words of another archaic old man telling a tale of his past. We are imperfect creatures with multitudes of flaws. As humans, we are capable of inhumane destruction. We are also humans capable of restoration. We have the capacity to end genocide permanently and to prevent innocent people for being sacrificed to another group's cause, to prevent children from losing their parents and being alone, and to prevent sadness and sorrow.

I do not want any more people to go through what I have been through. Seventy years after the Holocaust in Europe, each and every one of you in this room is capable of “Tikkun Olam”, a Hebrew phrase for “repairing the world”. Small acts of kindness will help repair of the world's impurities. Thank you for inviting me to speak and for listening intently. I hope that I have made a difference in your life and that you will make a difference in the world.”

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