

## Never Forget - It Is Our Duty By Drew McGillawee

Depending on whether you believe in the big bang theory or that of creationism you may have a different view as to why people are put on this earth. You may believe that you are on this earth to live God's word, or might believe in evolution and that we have no purpose other than to live life to its fullest. Although I don't necessarily know if there is a god, I do believe that at one point there was a higher power and each human being was put here for a special purpose.

We therefore are faced with the challenge of trying to figure out what our special purpose is here on earth. There are a lot of stories of people who feel that their purpose on earth is changing something that is wrong with the world. Despite something being a clear problem in the world, such as massacres, there are very few people who actually attempt to fix the problems that are so widespread. What sets these people apart from others is that they have vision and they take the time to actually think of a solution to the problem. Along with their vision, these people have the courage and aspiration to act.

People are constantly told that they can make a change in the world if they set their mind to it. Unfortunately, a common thought is that if you have not been through trials and tribulations, you cannot make a difference because you have not experienced what you want to change. But the truth is you don't need to have experienced or even have a connection to something horrible in this world to make a change. I had an eye opening experience, and I have now realized what my special purpose here on earth is. Writing this today, what I am trying to do is to convince people that any change whatsoever, big or small, is making a change.

This past April, I was fortunate to be chosen to attend the March of the Living trip to Poland and Israel. As I sat on the grass, overlooking a destroyed gas chamber at Auschwitz, listening to a Holocaust survivor retell his story, I began to think to myself "why am I here? And what am I supposed to gain from hearing this story of survival?" The entire time I was in Poland, for the first time in my life I thought and wondered about why I was put on this earth. I never thought that visiting a bunch of destroyed concentration camps and listening to a few stories would affect me so much and change my whole perspective on life.

I had been feeling quite guilty at the beginning of the trip because I had yet to feel extremely emotional towards anything. That all changed when my group visited Auschwitz 1, where we saw, to me, the most heart-wrenching thing of the whole trip. We were just finishing our tour of the camp when we were told that we would be walking through a gas chamber. Luckily for us, (or not so lucky, depending on how you look at things) it had not been destroyed by the Nazis when they were attempting to get rid of the evidence of their atrocities. We got up to the gas chamber door and as I was about

to walk in, my heart stopped along with my feet...I was completely motionless. A terrible smell began to fill my nose. To this day I am not quite sure what the smell was but my first thought when I finally stepped in was that it was the smell of death. We walked through the seemingly empty gas chamber and as we got farther in I began to realize it was not so empty. There were carvings on the walls of Yiddish words as well as Jewish symbols, such as the Magen David. I didn't think much of these carvings at first but as I stared at the wall, I came to the sudden realization that these were in fact scratches of people begging for help that never came. As soon as I came to that realization, I immediately left the gas chamber and sat on some steps outside. While sitting on those steps, I felt something that I had not felt on the trip up until this point. That something was a tear. And as I wiped the infinite tears coming from my eyes, off my face, I was greeted by one of my chaperones who was there to comfort me. What made me tear up in the first place was the fact that I was too late, I was not able to save those people who were screaming and scratching at the walls begging for their lives.

Later in the week, we had a ceremony honouring liberators of concentration camps, as well as those who were Righteous Among the Nations. We listened to stories of people, who were not Jewish, and how they would do things just because they were morally correct. We heard one story of a woman who was a doctor in Poland. She would enter the ghetto in her town to make sure that there were no outbreaks of disease; this was done on the order of the Nazis. While in the ghetto she would put babies in her medical bag and sneak them out. She would then drop these children off at an orphanage and would make sure they were adopted by a loving family. It was stories like these that left my heart melted and my voice silenced. It was then that I realized that even though I was too late to save the people from being murdered I knew that there was some way in order for me to help now, I just wasn't sure how.

As the trip continued and we heard story after story and testimony after testimony, I began to realize exactly how I could help. As I was listening to another survivor tell her story, I wondered how many survivors there were left in the world and how much longer they will be here. Upon thinking about that, how I was going to help came to me. All these survivors want is for people to hear their stories, and to understand that what happened was terrible. Along with that, we must never forget. Never forget the Holocaust and never forget the people who went through it. With their stories and testimonies we can ensure that something like this never happens again. That is exactly what I will do. I will never forget my experience in Poland, and I will make sure that I pass on the truths about what happened.

With this essay, I hope people understand that any attempt at making a change, big or small, is a change in itself. For me personally, I plan on being somewhat of a student educator, and that is something anyone can do. There are so many places in our community where people need guidance in how they can help - and giving that guidance is so easy. Organizing seminars, or volunteering to speak - to teach people about how to stop discrimination. These are just a few of the ways I am going to fulfill my duty on this earth.

We must never forget. It is our duty.