

Olivia Devaney

## Tears of Joy

Do you think the tears I am shedding for them are the same as the tears they shed for themselves or for the ones we lost? Do you think the way I slowly and mysteriously touch the walls of the museum, others touch in an exact way but with a different feeling? Whether it's similar to mine or not?

So many thoughts can race through a person's head as they stand in the middle of a horrifying but yet remarkable place such as the Holocaust Museum in the heart of Battery Park, New York. You see people and they see you. People surround you. All different types of people.

People who are white, people who are black, people who are Jewish, or people who are Catholic. Looking back now at my time there, I cannot help but really focus on why people were there. It couldn't have been just to learn. People have to go into that place and that situation already knowing a lot. Or at least knowing a little. What happens to those who don't know and who aren't prepared for what lies ahead of them? Although I wonder why others went there and can't make up my mind on why I know why I went there.

I walked in and already felt a heavyweight around me. I was petrified of what I would see because already strutting into the exhibit I saw a lot. I pulled my jacket around my body and attempted to click my high heels quieter down the street, but then it appeared. I slowly made my way to it, not admiring it, but just... gazing. I don't know what my gaze was. It wasn't in amusement, at all. It was not even close to amusement. Anyone who gazes at it in amusement should be talked to, and talked to sternly. I could not stare at it in amusement for it was a cargo cart. The carts were Jewish, or Gypsies, or whoever was unapproved by the German power were stuffed. They were stuffed in and locked in, being forced to stay there like they were some circus

animals waiting to perform. It was as if they were not human. They were the bottom of society. That is what truly made me sick that entire museum walk. The fact that people were not labeled as people. The fact that kids like me could not be kids. The fact that couples like my mother and father could not be couples. All they were was property or prisoners. That is the most utterly despicable and depressing thing I've ever heard. No, that is second to the most despicable thing I've heard. The first is that people believed it, and followed it, and joined that gross movement and still join it to this day.

I wore headphones to hear about stories in the exhibit. I saw the tables and desks. Desks of ex-Nazi leaders and tables of once-living and functioning Jewish people. I saw the bunks. The bunks where people may have attempted to sleep after a day of horror then awoke to restart the monstrosities but realized the person beside them was no longer living and breathing. All of them made me squint my eyes and tremble a bit. I would step back and try to look away. The stories... the people... it all made me miss a beat, made me hunch over just a tad and forced me to move on.

When I saw the map of Auschwitz I held back a gasp. It was there, in the back of my throat crawling up. I managed to just muffle it. It was the size of my town. My hometown Hazlet may have been smaller than Auschwitz actually. It was massive. Every chunk of the camp had a certain job. Parts killed, parts tortured, parts were just parts. My mother was four attractions behind me when I had reached the Auschwitz map/replica. I had to just stare at it. My eyes just wandered. To see huts that looked smaller than a garage be called homes, no those things were never homes, to be called or looked at as a place people could sleep and use restrooms was gag-worthy. I felt my

heart slowly breaking the more I looked and the more I bounced among the thoughts that were similar to my key thought which was *how could someone do such a thing?*

Every exhibit was harder but when I saw the outside, when I saw the sun again, I felt a dark cloud over my head being slowly pushed over by the sun I just glanced at. I was out. I was changed. I was moved and I would never be the same.

I asked before if all people's tears were the same. I asked hoping they would be. Now, I ask hoping they would not be. People are different and that is what is great about the world. That is what also led the Holocaust into action. But, the difference is, if there are too many people who are different no one can control us. Now I am proud to cry differently than everyone else in the museum. Now I am proud to be different. Why? Cause being different is everything the Nazi following despised. Showing them they would never rise or hurt us again, is what makes me cry tears of joy.

Eden Kim

### **All Thanks to Renaissance Church**

I walked through the white painted doors into a sunlit room. The temperature felt like it raised a few more degrees above boiling as the blazing summer sun reached in from the outside. I looked around the little room. The window casted shadows onto the floor, making it look as if there was a mob of kids near the back of the room. The room wasn't very large, there was a little table with food on it, a sitting area with couches, and a foosball table in the back of the room. At least it was bigger than my old Sunday school room. I felt extremely uncomfortable; as if I was in a room full of snakes, or other horrifying creatures. My family was trying out a new church. I was disappointed. I wanted to cry when I found out we were moving churches. Nothing would be the same. I felt an overwhelming grief engulf me whenever I thought about it.

My dad nudged me forward a little and I just stood there awkwardly. Out from the group of students in the room, emerged this tall, ginger-haired man. He had a friendly face, and had a pretty full smile. He was wearing a white button down sweater with jeans and he was holding a microphone. I was confused as to who would wear jeans in the summer, but everyone's got their own quirks. He was beaming as he shook hands with my dad. He had a very warm smile. He asked for my name. Eden Kim. As my dad left, the man came and said that his name was Tom. I was in a negative mental state so at the time I thought that this was a very generic,

predictable name. Boring really. I followed Tom to the back of the room and all the kids were standing in a circle. I could feel my cheeks becoming warmer, but I don't like to back down; so I stood there being all awkward. I also happened to be one of the shortest kids in the room if I may add. 4'10" is not my desired height, but that was what I was cursed with at the time. The people around the circle radiated an energy. They all seemed to know each other. A lot. I felt really out of place. I didn't belong here, I belonged where I wanted to be. I wanted to be at my old church back with my old leaders. Not Tom. Not here. Tom moved out of my way and gestured to the back of the room. He was very peppy as he stated, "I'm so glad you could join us today Eden!"

I didn't believe him one bit. I muttered a "no problem" and then walked towards the circle in the back of the room. It looked like there were at least 20 kids. I immediately looked each one down. A lot of them looked older than me. There were only a few that I singled out that had to be my age. I was standing in between a kid almost my height and another girl. The boy was a little bit shorter than me. He was wearing sports goggles instead of glasses. I got a little excited. Maybe he played soccer. Soccer was my all time favorite sport, I planned to ask him about it after this. He had a green shirt on and baggy shorts. The girl had a huge smile and she was talking to the kid next to her. She had red curly hair, and she had on black choker with a little spearhead bead on it. She wore a nice shirt, nothing too fancy or casual. She was also wearing shorts. Tom came over with his microphone and he said, "Alright guys, this is Eden."

I hated getting all the attention in the room. Everyone was now looking at me. I saw a lot of different eye colors meet mine. I just stared at Tom embarrassingly as he explained the game.

"Okay so the way this works is, say I call out Judah's name..." the kid next to me moved forward, "...me and Judah would switch places and then he would call someone, and we would have more people in the middle as the game goes on."

Everyone was ready to play. I wasn't. The glorious thought of sitting out immediately sprung into mind. Apparently it occurred to the other two girls next to me too.

"Can we sit out?"

Tom smiled playfully.

"Come on guys! Here, everyone has to play."

Oh shoot. Now I'm in trouble. I'm terrible at names. This was going to be such a big nightmare. I didn't even know anyone in the room. So far Judah and Tom were it. I took a deep breath and we started. It was a lot faster than I thought. I watched as a few people came into the middle.

"Maori...Noah...Rebecca...Kristen...Henry..."

I was starting to get a headache. There were too many people and then someone said, "Eden."

I looked at the tall skinny boy. Was it Henry? Or was it Noah? I walked out into the middle and spun around. Maori. My brain said that that girl was Maori. I said her name and she switched places with me. I actually did it. I felt a lot more accomplished than I should've. I watched satisfyingly as Maori actually chose someone else. My adrenaline was high, I don't like ice breaker games. I decided to pick the people who I knew their names. Noah was first. For once I could finally focus on the actual people that I was calling. Noah had blonde curly hair. He was wearing a red shirt that loosely fit over his shorts. The shirt said, "New England Champs" in

a funny font. He was super skinny and he didn't smile much, but he knew how to pull off a good grin. I switched with him and was standing in between who I think was Emma and Kristen. Kristen looked like a 9th grader. She was extremely pretty. She had silky-looking hair. I found it fascinating. Emma was wearing a choker similar to Maori's. They must be friends of some sort. Not a lot of people called on me, but a few did.

Before I knew it, the game was over. Tom was super perky. Then my brain shifted. Everyone was sitting down on the couches around the room. I found Maori and I sat down next to her as Tom started his little speech. I looked around the room and there were kids all huddled up on the couches. Everyone was being friendly, there wasn't a single person not smiling or talking; and yes that included me. I heard parts of conversations and even though it sounded like they all went to the same school because they were all talking so vividly about it, I was shocked to find they weren't. Tom had us all state what town we were from and I heard no New Providence in the mix. I was a little bummed out.

I sat back and listened to what Tom called his "mission". To be honest, Tom had a big mission. He had this saying that he repeated about 3 times. *We want to be Rooted in Jesus, be a Real Community, Reaching our World.* I watched as this man got the attention of a room of people that was 2 times as large as the last church I went to. There was a sense of respect that I've never seen out of a group of 20 middle schoolers. They all immediately started to listen as Tom explained dates that the group would be meeting. There was a pool party at someone's house next weekend. I was contemplating whether or not to tell my dad about it when Tom started to explain the meaning of the mission. It was pretty simple.

"Alright guys, so I'm just going to briefly explain what I meant by my mission. When I say that we wanted to be rooted in Jesus what do you guys think it means?"

This actually confused me a little. The questions that I got at my old church were generic, nothing about opinion always about fact. What are 3 of the animals that Noah took on the ark with him? Who were God's followers called? This question was different. I guess I had never really been given opinion questions. Judah was playing with a rubik's cube but he raised his hand.

"Yeah, Judah."

"It means, like to be able to trust and rely on God."

Other people chimed in and they added comments about the question. I watched Tom listen to everyone that talked. He had a very uplifting voice.

"Nice. That was all right. To be a real community is to work together like a body. We want to accept and uphold all of the people here."

I let that sink in. I looked over to Judah again and he had miraculously solved the Rubik's cube.

"Lastly, to reach our world is to take what you guys are learning here and tell others about it. I know that there's a new school year coming up, and it'll be challenging, but before you know it, this day will feel like a while ago. That's a wrap, you guys are free to go."

I watched as people left. I felt different somehow. As I walked back out those doors into the sun. I felt different, I felt a change. At that moment I felt like that quote.

"Keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you." -Walt Whitman

I took my next step towards the sun.

**Bansri Parikh, Grade 7, Academy I Middle School, Jersey City, NJ**

## Lost in Disneyworld

Music blasted, people were dancing, and others were chattering. I admired the Disney characters that surrounded us. Disneyworld felt like a fantasy full of amazing attractions, beauty, and definitely people. I was a seven year old girl with hair the color of a panther's fur. My hazel brown eyes couldn't take in all of the majestic sights. Along with me was my twelve year old sister, who rested on top of my father's head for a better view. Her silky hair, the color of charcoal, fluttered in the wind as if it were a gentle wave in the vast ocean. My dad carefully set her down, and snapped a picture of the lit up castle in front of us.

"Disneyworld is by far the most beautiful place I've ever been to.", my dad claimed, gazing at the sky. His eyes, resembling rich and earthy soil, shimmered with every word he spoke. My mother nodded her head in agreement, with a genuine smile painted on her rosy cheeks.

"Where should we go next?", my dad inquired.

However, I wasn't interested in what anyone had to say and instead watched mickey mouse dance around while he waved to everyone. The buttons on his shirt were lit up by the blanket of stars and the moon in the night sky. I turned around and instead of looking up to my parents' faces, I saw strangers walking past me.

"Mom? Dad?", I called out, only to discover that my squeaky voice was drowned out by the incredibly loud music. My view was blocked by people in all directions, and not a single one of them gave me a second look.

My heart practically burst through my chest as the reality of the situation hit me. I was a 7 year old girl separated from my family, with no way of contacting them. I burst into tears and began sobbing. The cobblestone floor glistened with every step I took while trying to make it through the crowd. After what felt like an hour, I finally found a man with a badge on his shirt

that read "Walt Disney World Security".

"I I-lost my f-family, and I need to find them.", I stuttered, barely making out the words.  
"Please help me!"

The man raised an eyebrow while pulling out a walkie talkie from his back pocket. He whispered words I couldn't make out into it, and then proceeded to talk to me.

"Hello, my name's Tom Parker, and I'll make sure you get back to your family as soon as possible.", he reassured me.

Subsequently, He signaled me to follow him, and I did exactly as I was told.

"Move to the side!", he yelled to the rowdy crowd. "I repeat, move to the side!" No one followed his demands and the area still remained as crowded as ever. Tom let out a sigh and reached into his shirt pocket, pulling out a wireless mini-microphone.

"Is there anything you don't have in your pockets?", I joked, trying to stay positive that I would find my parents.

Tom chuckled, while tapping on the microphone to see if it worked.

"Everybody move to the side!", his voice boomed once again. "This girl is looking for her family, please clear the path!"

People followed Tom's orders, and squished against each other to make space for us to walk. I finally had a clear view of what was ahead and I kept walking, hoping to see my family. I finally saw my mom's face, followed with my dad and my sister. I told Tom that I found them, and thanked him for helping out. "Bansri, where were you?!", my mom cried out. "We were worried sick!"

I told them the whole story, starting from when I got distracted up until when Tom cleared the path so I could find my family.

"Thank you so much!", my dad called out to Tom. "We really appreciate it."

Tom tipped his hat and walked away, and I felt so grateful to be with my family.

My distraction and lack of responsibility was what caused me to be separated from my loved ones. This situation allowed me to understand the concept of alertness and why it's important. If I was paying attention to my family, I wouldn't have struggled to find them afterward. Now, in order to avoid such a thing from happening again, I always remain close to my parents whenever I'm in public. Therefore, I won't have to worry about losing them.

Priya Patel, Grade 7, Academy 1 Middle School, Jersey City/NJ

### The Unforgettable Soul

My grandfather has been a very important figure in my life. He would not only play the role of a babysitter but also as my caretaker and parent. My parents worked most of the time, so I had spent most of my life with my grandfather. He would take me to the park or any local outdoor carnivals making sure I had a great time. He not only took me to school everyday but also tutored me in Math or subjects I had difficulty with. I truly considered him a second father and best friend. I would rely on him all the time and take him for granted, which is why the most tragic event that has happened to me in my life was when he passed away.

My grandfather would visit India twice a year for two or three months at a time, so it had become a normal situation. I would call him about two or three days a week, talking to him about his day and stay in India. In August 2015, it was very strange that he hadn't called me in over a week. I sensed there was something wrong but brushed it off as him being too busy.

A few days after this realization, my dad took an immediate flight to India. When I questioned his leaving, my mom would avoid answering me. Family members and friends started to stop by my house, but I was taken to another room with no one telling me what was going on. I had no clue that this dealt with my grandfather's death, so my curiosity about the situation had died down for the next few days.

Two weeks later, my dad had returned and told me the truth about what had happened. My grandfather had suffered a heart attack and was lying dead in his house in India for hours. When he first said those words, I was in complete disbelief. I had just talked to my grandfather two weeks ago; how could he have died? His return flight was in three weeks, and he had promised to take me to Six Flags, he can't just back out of his promises. I did not understand death and the situation, but I was aware that I was never going to see him again. I felt extreme anger and helplessness because I felt like he was taken away from me. Who was going to take me to the park or teach me how to ride a bike? Who would make me feel better when I got in trouble or take me to the movies every Friday?

I have never been heartbroken in my life up until that point. Everyday life did not seem the same, and I took it pretty hard for a few months. My anger became directed towards my

parents because I started to blame them for his death and keeping it a secret from me for two weeks. If I would have known, I would have gone to India with my dad to see him for one last time, and they snatched that opportunity away from me. It was only time that helped me move on from the situation.

I'm no longer in the angry and helpless phase of my life. I now understand the concept of death and how it is unavoidable. No one could be blamed for a natural death. I no longer remember him with extreme sadness and pain but instead with happy memories. I know that no one could ever replace him in my heart.

### **Ekansha Tabhane, Grade 7, Academy 1, Jersey City, New Jersey**

“This is going to be the best day ever!” I squealed. I was boarding our bus to Camp Bernie, sneezing, coughing and rubbing my eyes which had now become a daily routine thanks to my hayfever and allergies, but I couldn't let this ruin my two day stay. My friend Julia and I were split up onto different buses so I took my seat next to my other two friends Elena and India. Our teachers were desperately trying to get us to calm down and take our seats. The second everyone took their seats the roaring of the bus started and our school faded away into the distance. The only thing that could be heard was excitement in various forms; laughing, screaming, humming, tapping, jumping and many “are we there yet?!” A tradition me and my fellow students had were of course, the songs. Multiple songs filled the bus, “the wheels on the bus...” Elena started, India and I giggled and sang along, and soon everyone on the bus joined in, the song was sung horribly, but it was a comfort to everyone. I laughed and started singing louder, frowning at the thought that it might be my last year here, this made me more determined to make the best of what I had.

As we finally arrived, we were put into groups. Our group leader Ms. Rand the amazing storyteller called our names.

“Julia, Yunes, Justin, Charlotte, Maya, Dua, Franny, Owen, Aylah, Elyass, and Ekansha.”

The girls headed to their cabins and the boys headed to theirs. When I entered the room I immediately called a bunk with Julia in the first room of our large, double-sided cabin. As we sprayed bug spray on ourselves we met at the play area and played a few games, and tried to continue onto our first activity. We all reunited with our group to do our first activity, hiking. A long, painful, slippery, 2-3 mile hike greeted us as we set foot through the woods. As I hiked through the woods I could see many different types of trees and animals such as birch, oak, hazel, squirrel, birds, and much more. My group and I soon intersected with a road, which Maya fell on, twice, poor Maya. As Ms. Rand was getting Maya bandaged Justin, Yunes, Elyass and Owen were having a british accent fight. “Stay away from that dirty american” Justin and Yunes hollered, we all broke out with laughter. As we passed the final boulder, a beautiful view of ridgewood New Jersey appeared, everyone was amazed at the beautiful sight.

Our second activity took place near the stream. My group and I trekked up and down, far away to a stream. I stood outside the water afraid to get my shoes wet as everyone jumped from place to place trying to catch cool critters with their fishing nets. As we got back from our activity I sprayed bug spray on myself being cautious of ticks and went to the basement. A beautiful luxurious room was down stairs, much better than everyones bunks. We all went to

lunch and ate many different types of foods, salads, pasta, fruits, etc. Later, everyone went to the play area where I miraculously beat most people in tether ball. After our play time we had dinner, I quickly showered, dressed myself and ran to lunch. After it got dark we gathered around the campfire and sang songs, danced, and roasted marshmallows. After we got back, I sat cuddled on my bottom bunk listening to the creepy story Ms. Rand was telling us about the Lady of the Lake. As the story ended we got in bed, but, as usual, stayed up late playing games.

The next morning I got up and walked along with my group to breakfast. Our first activity today was critters. An instructor showed us many different animals like fluffy bunnies, snakes, turtles, frogs, fishes, and many more! Now came the time for my favorite activity, rafting. Our group split up into smaller groups. My group which had Julia, Charlotte, and Maya, were the first to finish. We made the raft by attaching 4 barrels with 4 long pieces of rope and 2 wooden planks. The group that contained only boys concluded that we had won even though we started very late because, Owen fell off the raft, and the other group, according to the boys, had cheated. I changed from my soggy jeans to shorts and sat down for lunch, savouring the food. I grabbed my stuff from my bunk and shot towards the yellow bus. A guide handed us Camp Bernie forms as we climbed on. I looked sadly back at the camp taking my seat next to India and Julia, with Elena on the other end. We all talked, laughing at memories that had been made. This was one of my best days at school so far.