

Faces, Names, Voices

By Samuel Olin-Hitt

We are the faceless,

The nameless,

The voiceless.

We watched the walls of Warsaw rise  
And we could not choke out one word in reply,  
For life was kind and we had enough to eat.  
Some of us shook our heads and said,  
“Isn’t it a shame?”  
But most did not,  
And took no notice of the torrent  
Of weary prisoners marching past our door.

We are the faceless,

The nameless,

The voiceless.

We closed our eyes and stopped our ears to the world around,  
Pretending every gunshot was a backfiring car,  
Or a firecracker.  
We did not see the starvation,  
But sometimes we smelled it,  
Thick and heavy,  
A stench like candied death  
Wafting over ghetto walls.

We are the faceless,

The nameless,

The voiceless.

When the cattle cars came, not all of us spat at their feet,

And so we believed that we were the righteous ones.  
Those of us who did not beat them  
Who did not rip their clothes and scatter their luggage  
Those of us who stayed back,  
Held our heads high,  
And proud,  
And said,  
“At least we were not involved.”

We are the faceless,  
The nameless,  
The voiceless.  
We never saw the piles of bodies in Treblinka,  
Or the smoke rising from Auschwitz.  
We did not pull the gold from their mouths,  
Or raid their homes for valuables.  
We did not raid their shops,  
Or break the glass.  
We did not hold the controls,  
And so we remained convinced  
That we were not involved.  
We kept our hands away from the river of blood  
Running through the streets of Berlin.  
We had never been to a courthouse in Nuremburg,  
And we never attended a rally.

But we were involved.  
As much as we tried to deny it,  
Every cut was ours as well.  
The faceless,  
The nameless,

And the voiceless  
Did nothing to stop the tide of violence  
Scarring the face of all the earth.

And so we turned to ourselves,  
And hid behind our false sense of righteousness.

But You,  
The exalted You,  
Spoke.  
You,  
The Oskar Schindler's  
The Miep Gies'  
The smugglers  
And the businessmen  
And the forgers,  
You have faces  
Your names will be remembered  
And your voices saved  
The world entire,  
One person at a time.

You,  
The celebrated You  
Stood for those who were beaten down  
And could stand no more.  
You held up trains from Belgium  
You sent fisher boats to Sweden.  
You fed the hungry,  
Clothed the naked,  
Harbored the fugitive,

And you can stand proudly  
And say  
“When the world spun one way,  
We reversed it.  
When all hope was gone  
We were the light.”

The time has come for us  
To stand with you  
The time has come for us, all of us,  
To cry out,  
With our faces,  
And our names,  
And our voices,  
And to say

“We will not be a part of this.”

The time has come  
For us to stand with you in the battle for human dignity  
The time has come  
For us to say “never again.”  
The time has come  
The time has come.