

Sometimes I don't remember my mother. I don't remember the color of her eyes or the words of the song she used to sing to me before I went to sleep at night. Sometimes I don't remember my mother, and that scares me.

Sometimes I can barely remember anything from before. Or things will come back in bits and pieces. I'll be eating a sandwich and it will remind me of the bread Mother used to buy from the bakery in town, or I'll see girls jumping rope on the sidewalk and I'll think of the games I used to play with my sisters, before. Before men came into the house in the middle of the night, before Father got taken away, before the dark truck where we were packed too tight to even breathe, before the cold barracks and the dirt and the smoke and the screaming that would start and then stop before you could figure out where it was coming from.

Maybe it's better that I can't remember. I don't try to talk about it. No one is left who would understand. My whole family is gone, everyone I knew. One day we were all still together-- hungry, scared, freezing in the ghetto with nothing but our old coats with those awful yellow stars, but still together. And then we weren't. I didn't even get to say goodbye.

Trying to go home after the war was a mistake. The people who had stayed behind stared at me as if they had never seen me before. My parents' house was empty. The furniture had been taken away, everything, from the old chest of drawers in the attic to the wooden crates in the cellar. I knew I couldn't stay there. I was twenty years old and I had nothing. Starting over seemed as good a choice as any. Five years later, I was in America.

Somehow, I got a job. I learned English as fast as I could, desperate to get rid of my accent, desperate to sound like everyone else. I didn't want to stand out. I've been working in the office for almost a year now and I haven't told anyone where I'm from or what happened to me. They know I came over from Europe, after the war. They know my family didn't come with me. They

don't need to know anything else. I've tried to forget everything that has to do with the war, and talking about it would make forgetting impossible.

But there's one thing I could never forget, even if I wanted to. It happened in the refugee camp, right after the war was over. They didn't take us far from Bergen-Belsen after we were liberated and there were thousands of us there, most of us alone and unsure if we even had anyone left. I was sick at first; I couldn't keep any food down. I could barely handle water. Even smelling the soup the other women were eating made my stomach turn. I was hungry and I was angry; the Nazis had starved me for so long and even when I had finally gotten away from them for good, I was still starving. And I felt like I couldn't say anything about that; if I said I was angry, people would think I was ungrateful. But one night, I'd finally had enough. I was tired of not being able to eat and I was tired of not being able to do anything about it. Lying alone in the infirmary, I screamed until my throat was raw. I didn't think anyone could hear me. I was wrong. "Is there anything I can help you with?" asked the nurse I hadn't noticed. I shook my head, ashamed that I had caused a scene. "Are you alright?" she asked. I nodded. The nurse turned to walk out of the room. But before she did, she told me something: "It's not wrong to be angry, you know. They took everything you had. You have to start your life all over again with people who will never really understand. Don't let them tell you that you should just be grateful to be alive. You're allowed to be angry."

No one had ever told me that before. I felt embarrassed about my anger. I felt as if I was disappointing my parents. They had *died* and I was angry about not being able to eat some bread and broth. But then I realized that I was allowed to feel unhappy. Yes, I was lucky to be alive, but that didn't mean I had to pretend everything was fine. It wasn't. It probably wouldn't be for a while, maybe not ever.

I'm not ready to talk about what happened to me during the war. I need to understand it myself before I can say any of it out loud. And I know that it's not wrong to feel that way. Being angry isn't wrong. Not wanting to talk isn't wrong. Most people won't be like the infirmary nurse; they won't know why I feel the way I feel. They'll try to tell me how I feel. But only I can know that. And how I feel is this: Sometimes I can't remember my mother, and that scares me. And what scares me the most is that maybe the reason I can't remember is because I don't want to. I don't want to remember everything and everyone that I lost. For now, it's enough that one person understood how I felt and knew what to say. But I know that someday, I'll be ready to remember. And when I am, I hope I can find the right person to listen.

"I Don't Remember"

By Emelie Fippin

Our Lady of the Elms HS

Word Count: 960