

FIRST PLACE HIGH SCHOOL POETRY

Candle of Hope

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Testimony: Selene Bruk

As I light a candle this Holocaust Memorial Day,
I stare into the flame and see the faces of the men, women and children,
Who lost their lives in the most brutal and barbaric way,
Empty shoes, all sizes and shapes, lie behind glass walls,
Lives cut short –
Their art, music, and writings never again to be heard in concert or museum halls.

Selene Bruk lived a carefree life in Poland,
No older than my sister in 5th grade, when the war exploded,
So young, yet the protector of her mother she became,
Finding strength, courage and resilience amongst the humiliation, hunger and shame,
“Hoping one day the war will be over and perhaps we’ll tell this story” (14.23-14.29).
So vivid are your words, Selene, I amtransported to Bialystok in its full glory.

The smell of warm challahs and freshly cooked fish, theatres and people walking the streets,
Gone forever - cruelly snatched away by those terrible beasts,
I see the shiny black boots as you hide under the bed,
And hear the crying of hundreds of children so scared,
I feel your shame as the Polish children laugh and point fingers as you pass,
And smell the stench of dead bodies and acrid smoke as you fear this day shall be your last.

Yet you held onto hope, and you prayed every day,
Living to tell your story in your own unique way,
You built a beautiful life after the war, but taught us never to forget,
The horrors you witnessed whilst facing the angel of death,
From you I have learnt to be proud and true,
To live a life that is meaningful and the privilege it is to be a Jew.

As I watch the candle, it reaches higher growing stronger,
I promise to keep telling your story, so the chain of our heritage becomes longer,
The flowers are blooming in Treblinka, the air is silent, the trees are green,
But from the ashes beneath rises a terrible scream,
*“Never forget! This cannot happen again.
Stand up to antisemitism– Mankind’s biggest shame”*.

Selene Bruk’s testimony can be found on the 1939 Society Website