

“Warmth in Others”
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Survivor Testimony: Leon Leyson

Fall, 1944 - Darkness enveloped the inside of the train car. Wheels rumbling, stomachs growling, and heavy breaths were the only sounds to be heard. As Leon Leyson stepped off the transport train within Gross-Rosen, one of the Nazis' most notorious concentration camps, anxiety washed over him. Looking around, he saw the likenesses of men without names or purpose; these had been stripped away by the Nazis. Catching sight of the towering brick chimneys of the camp's crematorium, Leon could hear the echoing screams of his people.

Upon disembarkment from the train, the inmates were stripped, roughly showered, and shaved; to Leon, all signs their treatment would be less than hospitable. Even his and his father's status as some of Oskar Schindler's 'essential workers,' which had protected them and others from death itself, could not shield them entirely from the Nazis' cruel actions.

As if cattle, the naked and shaved inmates were then herded into one group to await further instructions. Standing in this mass of weathered flesh and bones, Leon could hardly fathom the nature of what he and his fellow inmates would face. The boy's anxiety quickly turned into fearful anticipation.

The weather is nigh unbearable to the group of men; the cold fall temperatures pierce skin and bone alike, and with not an inch of protection from the ominous cold, the inmates are forced to take drastic measures. The outside of the writhing mass continues to rotate with the center, so the collective body heat spreads to all. Leon Leyson, a small boy, works his way towards the center of the men, hoping that he can keep from freezing to death. The gravel of the camp's ground, cold and rough, crunches beneath the young boy's feet, but he does not take notice; he only desires warmth, comfort, and the support of those around him.

The cold, rigid air is tormenting to his naked body. The continuous movement of the group is the only factor sustaining the boy's will to live. Yet, calling Leyson a boy does not pay proper respect or sorrow to the atrocities he has been subjected to. An experience such as this, full of pain, loneliness, and harrowing uncertainty has forced Leon to mature at an alarming rate.

Winter, 2016-2017 - Crunching snow, heavy breaths, thin clothing. The atmosphere is sad, hopeless, and anguished. Refugees seeking asylum in Europe have nothing but the clothes on their backs and the horrors they have left behind in their homelands to reflect upon. Looking across the Hungarian-Serbian border, these victims can do naught but hope for the salvation of warmth and acceptance. They must face the bitter cold and loneliness as they await their chance at finding a better life for themselves, their families, and future generations.

Like Leon Leyson, these refugees suffer. However, they do not have a huddled mass to seek refuge in; their only hope is acceptance over the border, or aid from relief efforts. They are not objects, nor animals, nor soldiers; they are families, children, and the elderly, stranded in the cold. They have wronged no one, nor have they committed any crimes, yet they are still left exposed to the elements. Like Leon, their anguish is the result of living in an inhospitable

location at a violent time in history. Cold, lonely, and seemingly forgotten, the refugees face many of the same challenges that the huddled mass faced while in Gross-Rosen.

Leave the innocent in the cold no longer; prevent the continuance of their suffering through compassion. Donate extra clothing, food, or supplies to relief efforts trying to solve the refugee crisis. Every minute that action is not taken to solve this dire issue, more people are being subjected to the conditions Leon Leyson faced. Thankfully, Leon's fellow inmates helped him cope with his situation. The refugees are not so blessed. It is the job of everyday people to be these refugees' huddled mass, providing the warmth, comfort, and aid that they so desperately need.