

The Boy Who Dared

As we advance further into the twenty-first century, it is evident that racial and religious prejudice poses a threat in society. A genocide is the worst degree of racial and religious prejudice resulting in a mass murder of people belonging to a particular ethnic group. (Jewish Virtual Library) In the year 1933, the genocide of over 6 million Jews commenced and is known as the Holocaust. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) Michael Kutz, a survivor of this tragic event was 10 years old when this took place and his story has provided me with a different perspective of this event.

Michael Kutz and his family lived in the town of Nieswicz, in present-day Belarus. His father had been mobilized earlier on by the Soviet Red Army; therefore, his family relied on him for their survival at the age of ten. In a matter of months, his childhood had been stolen from him. On October 30, 1941, Michael, his mother, and his siblings, were to gather in their town square. From there, the Nazis executed their gruesome plan. Michael was separated from his mother and his younger siblings. His mother's last words to him were, "My dear, beloved child. If, by miracle, you survive, you must bear witness [...] and remain alive to tell the free world what happened to us." (Kutz).

The Jews of Nieswicz were forced to march with the Nazi death squad, the Einsatzgruppen, in large columns through a forest. While proceeding through the forest, Michael saw the policemen stopping the Jews from advancing and forcing them to completely undress. Naturally, those who disobeyed were beaten to death. Michael's column advanced further into the forest until mass gravesites came into sight. He hesitated when he was ordered to jump into

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the pit and so was knocked unconscious and thrust into the pit. When he gained consciousness, it was nighttime, and the pit had not been shut. Fortunately, he came up with a plan which involved stacking corpses to climb out. Following the escape, Michael joined the Partisan resistance. After 1945, he traveled to Canada where he wrote his book *If, by Miracle* which is his transfixing account and experience of the Holocaust (Kutz).

The story of this young boy's survival showed how he persevered and fought through this adversity. Through the process of learning the tragedies he faced, I have realized that we as children in the twenty-first century are fortunate. We have the opportunity to prosper in an environment that encourages us to become the best we can be. Therefore, it is our job to take risks that will be in our favor and thrive in this ever-expanding universe.