

2012 Youth Writing Contest

First Place Winner: Upper Division (8th-9th Grade)

Leah, 10th grade, Kehillah Jewish High School, CA

Educator: Jaclyn Guzman

“Never say that there is only death for you...”

“If I was going to die, I was going to die as a fighter, not because I was a Jew.” When I heard these words spoken by partisan Sonia Orbuch, I was struck by their power and felt an immediate connection to their meaning. With these words, she asserted her state of mind while she was a Jewish fighter against the Nazis during World War II. Hundreds¹ of Jewish women embraced that same connection during the Holocaust and chose to be partisans. Women comprised only ten percent¹ of Jewish partisans, and they demonstrated the same will as Sonia and all of the other women and men who chose to fight rather than await death in a camp.

When I think about female partisans, I think about Hannah Senesh. Hannah escaped Nazi Europe, but chose to go back as a partisan to fight for her people. Her incredible decision to return and fight reveals the persistence common to all partisans. She was captured by the Nazis, but refused to provide them with information. For her silence, she was executed. Hannah was not much older than I am now, yet her actions prove that young women can impact the world. She did not stand idly by, but rather demonstrated unceasing passion by confronting the horrors inflicted upon her people.

While commemorating Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, I read about Roza Robotka, who led several other women in smuggling gunpowder to aid the Auschwitz-Birkenau uprising of 1945. Even this late into the war, partisan women such as Roza possessed the drive to fight Nazi hatred. Although Rosa and three of her female co-conspirators were hanged publicly, their actions inspire and reverberate almost seven decades later. The deeds of Sonia, Hannah, and Roza provide clear examples of women making a difference by standing up for and fighting for what they believe.

Today, there is still evil in the world, and women are still taking action against it. The legitimate leader of Myanmar (Burma), Aung San Suu Kyi, has been fighting for freedom for her people for twenty years. While not a partisan, Suu Kyi displays many of the same characteristics as the female partisans of World War II. The actions of partisan women were crucial in helping to defeat the Nazis. As a teenage girl, I strive to embrace the courage that these honorable women exemplified; they established the foundation for women like me to fight for the right to live freely. I am strongly influenced by their aspirations to defeat hatred and by their ceaseless will to die fighting rather than acquiesce to apathy.

Although the Holocaust is over, current events such as the genocide in Darfur resemble the horrors of World War II. Similar to the Nazi camps, hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians have been killed and displaced by the government-supported militia in Darfur. Jewish partisan women have taught me a vital lesson about the importance of opposing evil. Although hatred is a part of human nature that cannot ever be fully eradicated, it must always be battled. As noted in the song of the partisans, “Never say that there is only death for you.” If people do not fight evil, then evil retains its ability to grow. I will forever admire the passion, the strong will, and the persistence demonstrated by Jewish partisan women, like Sonia, Hannah, and Roza. They inspire me, and I believe that they will continue to inspire future generations.

¹ The exact number of Jewish partisan women is unknown, but it is estimated they numbered in the thousands – approximately 10% of all Jewish partisans.