

Lyla Hancock

Evening of Light Essay

I'm Lyla Hancock, a 17 year old junior attending Eastern Hancock High School. I heard about this contest from my teacher who is extremely inspired by Eva Kor's life story. I became fascinated in the idea of the essay because of the parallels between Eva Kor's life and my own. When I first heard Eva's life lessons, one in particular stuck out to me, "forgive your worst enemy."

Beyond the Hurt

When I read those words "worst enemy" my mind involuntarily went to my grandfather Mike. That and the fact that until the age of nine I was sexually abused by this man. This topic is very raw and very uncomfortable for people to hear and read about but it is real, similar to Eva's life story. Reading Eva's story was eye opening, comforting, and validating. Reading about all that she went through made me realize I had been through similar things in a way. I had to endure an awful man doing awful things to me for an extended period of time. I had to endure my sense of security being stripped away from me in a place I was supposed to be safe. I had to endure horrific situations in order to protect my younger sister. Eva has also endured these things just in a different manner; however, we both were just kids, both human, and we learned to survive.

Even after everything I was put through came to an end and I could claim my freedom from my own personal hell, PTSD followed me into everyday life. Something my therapist once said to me really stuck with me. "The more historical, the more hysterical.", she was expressing through this that the sooner it happened in your life the more traumatic for you and the bigger hold it will have on you as you age. When I read how Eva claimed her freedom from Mengele

and moved to a different country and yet was still haunted by the ghost of her past, that really resonated with me. After what I was suffering was brought to light, I encountered the whole legal process of the situation and eventually moved far away from my hometown. I relate to Eva in this way. Another way I relate to her with the aftermath of our traumatic events is the way that we were both silenced. I was told to never speak about what happened after the legal process was complete and I moved away, not even my own family members would speak about it. Eva was silenced when she tried to speak out about what happened and demanded that her and other survivors be seen. Now that I am older I have found my voice and I am not ashamed of something that was not my fault, I couldn't control, and can't take back. I'm no longer afraid to speak about what I was put through because it needs to be spoken about.

Another parallel I picked up on was the fact Eva was so angry for so many years, and I, too, was full of hate and rage. I was angry at my grandfather for what he did, I was angry at the world for not protecting me, and I hated that man with all my heart. This is where Eva Kor's life message "forgive your worst enemy." came in. What we endured is not who we are, it is a part of our story, and it's just that, ours. We may not get to choose how we are seen but we can choose to talk about what happened because we are strong. Talking about it and showing that we aren't just a perception of fragile and cracked porcelain dolls prevents that very prejudice and can change both people's opinions about us and other survivors' opinions of themselves.

I grew up in a Christian home and was taught to forgive no matter what. When it came to my grandpa it was the hardest thing I had to do. Reading and hearing that Eva was incredibly angry at Mengele and that it was so hard to forgive him was validating for me. Forgiveness isn't about deciding that what someone did to you was okay and it's fine now—I learned it's about freeing yourself, and for me I realized my hate for Mike is not going to change what happened

and what is. I will only be hurting myself with such rage. I learned I can let go of the rage and free myself and forgive him, not for him but for me. Reading about how Eva also had to figure out what forgiveness meant to her was incredibly affirmative for me. Seeing how she found peace even though she was put through one of the most horrible things a human can encounter gave me hope for my future. Through this Eva has given me hope. Hope that I can be happy and leave the awful in the past and flourish in life. No matter what happens to me I can find joy, create a family, and live my life how I see fit. I truly believe this now, because I've seen her do just that.

Eva's story may have been about one event but there were many victims who suffered the same fate. Similarly my story about an event I suffered, yet there are so many more victims. As a survivor of sexual abuse I can say that Eva's life message forgiving your worst enemy, applies to not just me but other survivors that have endured similar trauma. Eva's story will always hold a special place in my heart because of the parallels. However even without my specific parallels, forgiving your worst enemy is such a strong message for survivors anywhere. So, yes, I will continue to share my story and forgive, just like Eva.