

Addison Koie

Mrs. Grabowski

Holocaust Literature

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My name is Addison Koie, and I am a senior at Terre Haute South Vigo High School. I am taking Holocaust Literature not just because I am fascinated with Jewish culture, but I am also part Jewish. Eva's story and other survivors of genocide have helped to me to heal a part of me, and give forgiveness in a situation I thought was hopeless.

#### A Beacon of Light

I was and am a child of adoption. While most kids struggle with a lack of transparency by their parents, mine were always supportive and aware of my situation. I always knew about my adoption, and I never questioned my parents' love and care. I have some of the best memories with my family, even if they didn't spoil me rotten. Living in a family where money was tight taught me a lot of patience and contentment with some of my worries, but we always had enough. I had siblings, a roof over my head, an education. What did I need to worry about? To be quite transparent, I worried about pretty much everything as an adopted child. How did I measure up in my parents' eyes? Would I be just another child to feed and care for? Or, the one I struggled the most with: how can I be loved if my biological mother didn't even want me?

Many sappy children's novels depict how special it is to be adopted. All my life I had been told that it was nothing to be ashamed of, and I didn't have to carry it alone, but I did. Even into my teenage years, I started to doubt my worth more, and saw myself as less than anything.

My questions started to turn into bitterness and hatred for what my biological mother had and hadn't done. I didn't see a way that I could justify or accept her actions. Eventually, I would wrestle with self hatred, and often would see myself better off dead. The pain was too much to carry, and I was willing to do anything to just feel like I was something or get rid of this aching feeling in my chest.

In July of 2019, my mom and I were walking around at the Vigo County Fair, and a chalk drawing of Eva Kor appeared. I had no idea who she was, but my mom was quick to tell me all the facts about her: how she survived the Holocaust, about her beautiful, blue outfits she always wore, and about her story of forgiveness. I've grown up a Christian, so forgiveness was not something new to me. Her life was special, but didn't impact me personally at the time. Five years later, I was invited to record a STAND event hosted at the CANDLES Museum as a part of SBTV's crew. The keynote speaker, Kizito Kalima, spoke about his story, and his overall message: Forgiveness - his simple little message that I kept hearing. Then, the heaviness hit as tears streamed down my face. All the weight, hatred, burdens, and pain I carried was because I didn't want to forgive someone I have never even known or had been given the chance to communicate with. At that moment, I realized I had the power to choose -- would I forgive my birth mother?

As one can imagine, forgiving her was hard. I wrestled to find the words and feelings to forgive my birth mother. I didn't forgive her immediately; I had to overcome my bitterness, and two, I had no personal connection to her like Eva Kor had with Dr. Munch. I would love to say it only happened once, but just like my best friend tells me, forgiveness is an everyday choice; when I tell you there is freedom, though, Eva and Kizito were not kidding. I wasn't struggling with my worth, and finally, I was more open to my adopted parents about my hurt and internal

conflict. Eva puts it this way, and quite honestly, her words are better than mine: “Anger and hate are seeds that germinate war. Forgiveness is a seed for peace. It is the ultimate act of self-healing.” I recognize I am going to wrestle with forgiveness in the future because choosing to forgive is part of the human condition. If Eva can forgive someone such as Dr. Mengele and lived her last moments in the freedom of forgiveness and self healing, how much sweeter my life could be if I make that same choice?

Eva’s story is such a light to me, and being 1% Jewish, I love having a small connection to such an amazing human. It’s not just Eva’s story that inspires me. What happened was a tragedy, and that by no means should be seen as any less. I am fortunate to be the last generation to ever hear from a Holocaust survivor, and live in a society where Eva’s video testimony is available. I have the opportunity to take a class to become immersed in her culture, and have a better understanding of the Shoah. I live fifteen minutes away from the museum Eva poured out her heart and ministry into. So what do I do with all I have gleaned from Eva Kor? I have the privilege to live out the wishes of Eva, Kizito, and so many others: for people to live in a world where forgiveness is normalized and seen as second nature. I can only hope and pray that I am a beacon of light in a world where darkness tends to be thick. Eva once said, “I want my time here on earth to count for something.” The choice, to be quite honest, lies within every one. It’s what we choose to do with our power that can sprout forgiveness or root bitterness.