

## **Breaking the Silence** by Stephanie Weddington, Burke High School

“The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing” (Edmund Burke). The Nazis alone cannot be blamed for the Holocaust; the world sat back and watched six million innocent Jews and five million other people die in concentration camps. The only way to defeat injustice is to take a stand against it.

On April 18, 1943, 17-year-old Jerzy Kozminski was asked by a complete stranger to make a life-altering decision. Samuel Glazer asked Jerzy to save his family from the Nazis. A few days later, he returned to the Warsaw Ghetto with his mother, Renia Kozminski, and evacuated all 13 members of the Glazer family (“ADL”). They remained in the Kozminski basement for over a year. Jerzy was later captured by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp, but refused to expose the Jewish family residing in his basement.

More than 70 descendants of the Glazer family live today because of the moral courage displayed by Jerzy and Renia in the 1940s. The Kozminskis received the much-deserved Courage to Care Award by the ADL in 1996. Many other individuals displayed moral courage comparable to that of the Kozminskis during the Holocaust. “These men and women who saved Jews at the risk of their lives and the lives of their families demonstrated that good continues to live where evil may reign,” said Mr. David H. Strassler, ADL National Chairman at the award presentation.

Like these risk-takers of the Holocaust, Martin Luther King, Jr., is considered a hero for taking a stand against racial discrimination during the Civil Rights movement. He once said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Dr. King displayed moral courage by speaking up for the many African-Americans who were unable to make their voices heard. Thanks to his determination for equality, today, whites, blacks, and Hispanics all live together; however, I still witness hate crimes in my own community.

Just a year ago, Bob’s Food Mart, located on N. 16<sup>th</sup> St., was robbed and burned. The Omaha World-Herald reported that the manager of the store, an Ethiopian immigrant, was duct-taped and put in the basement. Luckily, he escaped and was unharmed.

Amongst the rubble, on the back wall of the store, were the words "Go home" written in red. The neighborhood in which this robbery took place has a reputation of being racist. In 1981, a black family came to visit a newly built duplex on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and the next day it was in ashes.

Even more recently, 21 year-old Brittany Williams was shot and killed while waiting in a KFC drive-through located on 7601 N. 30th St. on Jan. 20, 2008. Kyle Bormann, 19, admitted to killing her. Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine believes that race played a part in her killing. Bormann never admitted to being a racist, but shortly after his arrest he made several comments degrading black people (Cooper).

In my every day life I see acts of hate. At school, and even at home, I witness discrimination based upon appearance, heritage, or income. By standing up to the people who commit these acts of hate, I am helping to put an end to the silence. Everyone is different, and we should embrace that. Without diversity, our world would be dull.

Although the world promised never again would anything like the Holocaust happen, there have been multiple genocides. The most recent genocide is currently in Darfur. President Bush labeled Darfur genocide, the first time in U.S history a conflict has been labeled as such while still happening ("The Genocide"). This recognition is a major step to recovery; however, the U.S has done little since declaring Darfur genocide.

It is our responsibility as members of the human race to realize that what is happening in Darfur is wrong. We need to spread the word about the genocide in Sudan. The more people we inform the greater chance we have to save lives. To help the cause, we can sign petitions to get world leaders involved, donate money to organizations like the Save Darfur Coalition, or join a group to inform people in the community. At [savedarfur.org](http://savedarfur.org) wristbands, t-shirts, car decals, and other items can be purchased, with the proceeds going towards awareness and education efforts. Every person's support contributes to the ending of the genocide in Darfur. It takes a great deal of moral courage to end a genocide.

Like Jerzy and Renia Kozminski, I will stand up for what is right, and not take part in the ugliness of prejudice. Unlike Brittany Williams' killer, I will not make judgments based on appearance. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., I will reach out to those in need and speak out for those who are unable. I will not remain silent.

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