

Comparing Hitler to a Neighborhood Bully

It is difficult to compare the horrors of the Holocaust to the relatively mild injustices of prejudice, intolerance, stereotyping and bullying. The Nazis' murder of six million people is thought of as unequalled in horror and unparalleled in evil. We simply cannot imagine experiences more terrible than the ones that Aranka went through: being herded into a cattle car as if she were an animal, being starved even when food was available or being told to step into a line which leads directly to a gas chamber. The stories told by Holocaust survivors reveal the darkest and most satanic side of human nature – a side that, we like to think, only surfaces in extreme cases. Unfortunately, though, the same sort of prejudice that was shown during the Holocaust still exists today as acts of intolerance that occur daily.

When it comes down to it, Aranka's experiences are not all that different from those of, say, a teenager being bullied at his or her high school. Both situations involve an oppressor (in this case, the Nazis or the school bully) taking advantage of a victim for reasons that the victim cannot control. Aranka cannot change the fact that she is Jewish and neither can the teenager change the fact that he or she wears glasses, speaks with a lisp or, maybe, has a different sexual orientation. Many people who are subjected to discrimination or prejudice experience similar feelings of loneliness to the ones that Aranka felt within the grim barbed-wire fences of the concentration camp and imposing brick walls of the ghetto. These people feel trapped by the opinions of those around them, leaving them afraid and unable to express their beliefs to anyone but themselves. This problem grows worse when the discrimination is severe enough to lead to physically isolation or segregation from a particular group. In fact, this sort of intolerance and

extreme racism was one of the essential factors leading up to the Nazi's abuses of civil rights. Many of the main factors and problems related to the Holocaust, are similar to those associated with "everyday" prejudice.

So how can we be sure that everyday prejudices do not turn into our worst nightmare? First, we must all be ready to stand up and take responsibility. The key to solving problems caused by intolerance is catching them at the source and addressing the issue immediately. For example, if one witnesses his or her friend bullying someone else, he or she must take responsibility and confront the friend and explain exactly what the friend did wrong. If this act is allowed to go unnoticed, the friend (in this scenario) will never learn to respect others' differences. Second, this responsibility to act must be applied to *all* levels of discrimination from a seemingly harmless joke to a race-related crime. Even discriminatory actions that seem very minor can leave a lasting impact; therefore they must be taken seriously. If every one of us acts according to these guidelines, we will eventually be able to reduce the evils of discrimination.

If there is one thing we should take away from Aranka's story, it is the *similarity* between the Nazi's war crimes and typical playground bullying; the only major difference between the two is the severity and scale. By recognizing this fact, we can appreciate just how fine the line is between everyday prejudices and a second Holocaust. Wait! No need to gather up your valuables just yet; all we need to do to avoid another massacre is take responsibility. Each of us must keep our eyes and ears open for issues involving intolerance so that we can resolve these conflicts before they escalate out of our control. We must all act together to throw off the chains of discrimination – if we do not, we are in danger of a second Holocaust.