

Becoming a Rescuer

Our beliefs give us strong opinions, but few of us can defend them at any cost. The few who can surrender anything to stand up for their beliefs, however, demonstrate moral courage. Throughout history, these people have been looked to as heroes and role models. During the Holocaust, those with moral courage were rescuers who would risk being shot or starved to death to try to save Jews. Sometimes these rescuers even welcomed strangers into their homes. We learn about this altruistic, selfless behavior not only so we can give the rescuers the respect they deserve, but also so we can extrapolate this knowledge, and apply their traits to our own lives.

Too often during the Holocaust, people were bystanders, never considering the power of their voices. Many disagreed with the Nazis, but had never faced a situation so dangerous and intimidating. Oskar Schindler, a registered Nazi, refused to follow the trend. Although this man is thought of a hero today, he had many appalling traits: "He was a heavy drinker and a womanizer; he was an opportunist and a crook; he was a profiteer and an egoist" (Robert s 10). With this mindset, Schindler saw many opportunities in Kraków, where the new Polish government was located, so he moved there.

He became a more active and respected member of the Nazi party, and attained two small factories that produced "enamelware" pots and pans, and later established his own factory. Schindler wanted to help the war effort, so as his fortune grew, the company "expanded into a mammoth enamel and ammunitions production plant, occupying some 45,000 square meters and employing almost 800 men and women" (Oskar). He employed many Jews from the Kraków Ghetto as cheap labor.

Though Schindler had a horrific reputation, he lost his belief in the Nazi policy of hatred towards the Jews. "As daily living conditions worsened for the Jews, he made a special effort to offer help and simple kindnesses, such as providing food to Jews who had been thrown out of their homes and businesses" (Roberts 11). When the Jews from his factory were to be deported to Auschwitz, Schindler bribed the Nazis with diamonds and other items to keep this from happening. Then, instead of going to Auschwitz, the factory workers went to a special branch in Plaszow to continue working for Schindler. He justified that this group was helping with the war effort by making bullets, and though the Nazis often doubted this motive, there was no evidence to go against it. Schindler managed to smuggle in enough food and medicine to keep "his children," or his workers, strong enough to survive.

By doing this he became a secret ally, becoming a friend to the Jews, and working against the other Nazis. Oskar Schindler went from a wealthy, greedy man, to a poor man, bribing guards with everything he had. He encountered many close calls, and was arrested for his anti-Nazi actions multiple times. While these risks could have deterred his motivation, he showed the altruistic qualities of moral courage instead, and did not let fear get in the way of accomplishing what he knew was right. He managed to save over 1000 Jews, more than any other rescuer.

After the Holocaust we promised "never again." History is repeating itself in Darfur, however, and it is important that we do not let this continue. We hear stories of women raped and children brutally murdered. These international crimes are taking place on the other side of the world though, and our government has not made a strong stance against this, so we have easily become the ignorant bystanders that we saw in the Holocaust. The problem is not that it takes so much work to become an ally, and to become a voice for these people. Instead, the problem is that it is easy to remain silent. It is important that we take action, and make sure everybody is aware of these atrocities. We need to write letters to our government, urging our president and congress to send troops to fight this crisis, and we

need to send money, clothes, and food to help the victims. We need to vote with this genocide in mind.

Though I have never spoken out in a life or death situation the way Oskar Schindler did, I try to do my part as a rescuer. To me, being a rescuer is not about acting globally, but rather, by doing my part locally to make global changes. While I am active in big causes, such as trying to help end the genocide in Darfur, I also try to make smaller changes wherever I am. For example, when I hear a student in my school's halls using racial slurs, rather than simply disapproving, I make it known to him that he is acting inappropriately. When he hears bold statements against his actions, it catches him by surprise, and he remembers it the next time he is about to make the same mistake. Along with this, I do not include these words and phrases in my own vocabulary, hoping to set a good example for others. Schindler was able to save lives as a rescuer, and though I may be unable to do the same, I wish to rescue somebody from being hurt later by a racial comment, and I wish to take a step in abolishing such language, helping to rescue the world from such hatred.

Everybody has opinions, but it can be difficult to defend them because it is easy to remain silent. As we have seen in the Holocaust,

however, silent bystanders create danger, and rescuers with moral courage have created opportunities for life. Oskar Schindler represents an unlikely hero, who rescued many Jews altruistically. When we look at his example, we not only honor it, but we also see values that we should integrate in our own situations, whether we wish to end a genocide in Darfur, or stop people from using racial slurs.

Works Cited

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