

## **We All Must Help**

**by Leslie Walker, Burke High School  
11-12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Third Place**

Having the courage to stand up when everyone else is sitting down, being brave enough to act on your beliefs to save people who do not have a voice and fighting for what is right are all definitions of moral courage. Throughout history, in times of war, genocide, racism, and persecution thousands of people have shown and exemplified moral courage. During the Holocaust, many showed moral courage in a time of chaos. Today, we see a raging genocide in Darfur, Sudan, which leaves many wondering whether anything has been learned from the mistakes made in the Holocaust. These acts of hate do not just occur in history books or far away countries. They are real and cause pain to millions of people. This pain starts with small actions of hate in everyday life.

The Holocaust was a time of chaos, death, and tragedy, but it was also a time when a few decided to stand up while the rest of the world remained sitting, watching the horrors of the war and afraid to get involved. These people who stood up we now call heroes. They themselves say they are not heroes; they say that they did what they knew was right. One of these people is Gilberto Bosques Saldivar. He denied ever being a hero stating that he simply, “implemented my country’s policy, a policy of help, of material and moral support to the heroic defenders of the Spanish Republic, to the relentless brave people who fought against Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Petain, and Laval.” Despite what he considered himself, Saldivar did commit many extraordinary actions during his lifetime, especially in World War II.

Saldivar became involved in the Holocaust because he was stationed by Mexico as his government’s consul general in Marseilles, France, in 1939. As the Nazi’s gained power and began to push out of Germany, Saldivar did not second guess his beliefs and immediately stepped into action. When the Nazi’s invaded France, Saldivar instructed the consulate staff to issue a visa to any person wanting to flee to Mexico. In all, he issued 40,000 visas which went mainly to Jewish people. One of the ways he helped the people to leave and escape the Nazis was by chartering ships out of the port at Marseilles. These ships transported people to Africa where they were later helped to Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. He also directly saved and hid Jewish people unable to flee along with the leaders of resistance groups who were supposed to be sent to concentration camps. He did so by buying two houses specifically to house and protect these people. Throughout the war he did not falter in his efforts to save anyone who needed help. Even when faced with his own death, he did not back down. In 1943, he was forcibly taken by the Gestapo. Saldivar, his wife, his three children and forty members of his staff were taken and held in captivity for a year near Bonn, Germany. The group of prisoners was released only because an agreement between the governments of Germany and Mexico had been reached. He returned

to his home country where he continued to work as a politician and diplomat. Gilberto Bosques Saldivar led an extraordinary life, and we should take a lesson in moral courage from his actions.

Have we learned anything from our past mistakes and the moral courage shown in people such as Gilberto Saldivar? Genocide in Darfur, Sudan, has continued to escalate since it's beginning in 2003. The war has displaced between one and two million people, and it has killed 50,000 to 450,000. This is going on in our lifetime. We as a people have made the mistake of ruthlessly killing each other time and time again. If we have made the mistake before, why have not learned the lesson of moral courage? People like Saldivar stood up in the face persecution, racism, war and death because they had to do what was right; so, now who does the burden fall on to stand up in today's world?

In today's standard high school setting most people seem to get along well or at least tolerate each other. In general that statement is true, but in many cases the perfect high school where everyone gets along is far from reality. The scene in the movie *Freedom Writers* depicts a classroom which is separated by race and hate. A stereotypical drawing of a black person with large lips sends the class into an outrage. The teacher uses the opportunity to show the students how a racist drawing turned into the Holocaust. It's a common feeling among our society that our actions do not have any consequences. After seeing this movie, I've realized that the massive genocides and racism started with the smallest actions of hate. The crude drawing made by someone as a joke, the racial slur yelled across the hallway and the bullying of people who differ from what we see as normal are all actions which occur every single day. They are also the same actions which lead to racism, persecution, and violence.

It's not okay to just let those small actions of hate happen as long as you are not participating. That is how the small actions turn into violence. If nobody stands up and says that the racist joke isn't funny then who's going to keep that person from telling it again? It is up to all of us to show our moral courage everyday. We don't have to save lives like Gilberto Bosques Saldivar or move to Africa to stop the genocide. Even as high school students, we can do our part in carrying the burden of preventing another Holocaust. The burden is ours to stop the small actions of hate by showing our moral courage, fighting for what is right and speaking out for those who don't have a voice.

#### Bibliography

- "Courage to Care: Gilberto Bosques Saldivar." 14 Nov. 2008 . Anti-Defamation League. 9 Feb. 2009 <[http://www.adl.org/main\\_Holocaust/Bosques\\_Saldivar.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Holocaust/Bosques_Saldivar.htm)>.
- Freedom Writers*. Dir. Richard LaGravenese. Perf. Hillary Swank, Patrick Dempsey. 2007. DVD. Paramount , Jan. 2007.
- "Gilberto Bosques Biography." The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation. 9 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/?en/saviors/diplomats/bosques/gilberto-bosques-biography.801.htm>>