

Dear Mr. Waisman:

I'm almost certain it was four years ago that you came to my small town high school in Invermere, BC to talk to my classmates and I about the Holocaust. I was a Grade 10 student, and I was there to cover the event for my high school newspaper. I was very excited to be there, because it was my first "big break" as a reporter. This break came at a time when I was beginning to consider becoming a journalist.

There were many people throughout my years of school who came to talk to us about different topics, but what you told that room full of kids, what you told me, has stuck with me every single day of my life. After four years of thinking and writing and re-writing, I think I finally know what I would like to say to you, the person who has profoundly affected the rest of my life.

The Holocaust was very difficult for me to comprehend. It's so big, so impossibly awful that there was a feeling of disconnect when I thought about it-I understood the events, but I didn't understand what that meant for the people who were there. Hearing you talk about what happened to you and your family made the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust real, but it also made people and pain real. Your speech made that connection for me, and after school that day I went into my room and I cried. I just cried. I cried for you, I cried for every person who perished in the Holocaust. I cried for people who suffered in other human rights catastrophes. But I also cried for the people on the other side, the so called "bad guys" because they were and are, saturated with hate.

Lastly, I cried for myself, but I cried tears of joy. I realized I am possibly one of the most blessed people in the whole world. Because I listened to you describe the loss of your family, I learned to better love mine. I learned to appreciate everything my mother and father do. I took your advice and I hug my brother and sister when they break things or when they are not behaving. They don't fully understand why I do this, but I hope one day they will. I learned to be grateful for the roof over my head, for the food on my plate, for the shoes on my feet.

I also learned to forgive people who have wronged me, people who I have every reason to be upset with. Sometimes, this is extraordinarily difficult. Sometimes I struggle. But I do not allow myself to hate, because the last thing our world needs is more hate. In the end, I am always able to forgive. I am always able to love. I am always able to give love, and to be an example of love. When I find it most difficult to love and forgive, I look through your recorded history on the Vancouver Holocaust website, and go back to those lessons I learned. I guess what I'm trying to say is that you've become my role model for what peace and love is, and what peace and love can be.

The day you came to my school as also the day I realized I am supposed to be a journalist-To give people a voice and a chance, to record what happens to us all, for the sake of all of us. I'm going to school to be journalist, and I have the chance every week to write for a paper that many people read. I want to thank you for being the sign I was looking for when I wasn't sure what to do with my life.

Finally, I would like to say that what you do, when you talk to people about your life, even if it's really hard-it matters. It makes a difference. It is important and it changes lives. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I haven't made an impact on the world despite the many things I've written and done. I always remind myself that even if I can change one mind, if I can convince just one person to be more compassionate, that it a wonderful thing. Every drop fills the jug. If I am the only person who you made an impact on, I want you to know that it still counts, it is still significant, and that you have done something incredible.

It's taken me four years and about a page and a half, but I think what I really want to say is thank you.
With Peace, Love and Gratitude,

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