

## Kimmelman Contest

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To some people, the Holocaust is simply another tragic historical event. They may read about it once or twice, but it isn't something that they remember every day. However, for someone who has been its victim, the Holocaust is far more than just another tragedy. It is a personal tragedy—an experience that they will never forget. Many of these individuals have shared their experiences, helping to cement the horror of the Holocaust into the minds of the world. Mira Kimmelman is one such survivor. Her Holocaust experiences changed her worldview, and they also helped her create a message of remembrance that she shared with people from all walks of life.

Mira Kimmelman grew up in the city of Danzig. As the dark days of Hitler's reign arrived, her family moved to Warsaw, and then another city called Tomaszow. She experienced the terrors of the Blizyn, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen camps. Later, she survived a death march that took the lives of people all around her. She was eventually liberated, but she never forgot that she was one of the lone survivors of her family. Many of her relatives had perished. Among them was her younger brother ("Lecture to students"). Mira credited her survival to God, her friends, and the kindness that prompted others to share food with her. "We were determined to go on, to retain our humanity, to live despite the danger and obstacles," she wrote in *Echoes of the Holocaust*. "But most of all the will to outlive our enemies gave me and my friends the inner strength to survive," she continued (Kimmelman 58). Mira believed it was important to share her memories with others, in order that they may remember the Holocaust and not allow it to happen again (Kimmelman 165).

The Holocaust affected the worldview of many of its victims, and Mira Kimmelman was no exception to this fact. After the war, Mira married and had her first son. "He was God's gift to us," she said of her child, Benno. "So many of my friends were unable to have children, I felt so lucky, so blessed" (Kimmelman 128). Mira's feelings show how the Holocaust affected her sense of gratitude. After being through so much, she was extremely thankful for her blessings. The war also showed Mira about the

power of friendship. She had many friends throughout the Holocaust. In one lecture, she said that it was critical for friends to trust and depend on one another at that time. Her friends became like blood relatives (“Lecture to students”).

After the war, Mira was also more aware of the depth of human cruelty. She warned that the Holocaust could recur. “It can happen again. Because the Holocaust started because of hate, because of intolerance, because of antisemitism. It can happen again! It can happen to any group of people, if we allow hate to take over,” she once said in a television interview (“WBIR-TV 10”). In one of her books, Mira said that the only way to ensure that the Holocaust would not recur was to remember it (Kimmelman 165). In addition, the fact that Mira even spoke about the Holocaust showed how much she believed in remembering it. She was willing to go through emotional pain, facing the horrors of the past, so that others could learn about the Holocaust. It was clear that Mira wanted more people to know the truth, that she wanted more people to remember the truth. “Agonizing as it is each time I speak, I know how important it is,” she once wrote (Kimmelman 160). She was determined to share her message with others, even if it meant facing the traumatic memories of the past. Mira was very, very dedicated to remembrance.

Mira also warned against hate, one of the driving forces of the Holocaust. In one of her lectures, Mira described it as “a very strong emotion”. She expressed that she wanted justice, but she never wanted hate. “I never hated. I never could hate. Hating would have destroyed us,” she said (“Lecture to students”). But hate is all over the world. It has grasped people and societies for centuries. It is easy for this emotion to spread, and once it does, its victims could be in serious danger.

That is why Mira stressed the importance of remembrance when she talked to people. “After they listen to me, I ask for one and only one thing: Remember what I've told you. The burden of remembering is now with them,” she wrote in her memoir (Kimmelman 160). We must remember the suffering of the Jews. We must remember the six million who were murdered. We must tell our friends and family, and remind them of what can happen because of hate.

One may wonder why Mira was so focused on remembrance. Mira knew that if the Holocaust would be forgotten, the lesson that it teaches would also be forgotten. Hate, discrimination, and division would abound. By looking at what happened in the Holocaust, we can learn just how low humanity can go. The Nazis are looked upon today with shame for their cruelty. But will there be new “Nazis” in the future, going under a different name? How successful would they be if they used modern technology? I believe that Hitler would have given anything to have the technology that we have today. It would have allowed him to spread his agenda even further. This is why remembrance is so important. If we don't remember, then hate will be allowed to spread, and a new group of victims will be targeted. A more horrific Holocaust could occur.

Holocaust education is very important. Today, it is available to the world through the Internet. One can read books about the Holocaust, watch interviews with survivors, and look at photos of concentration camps, all from a laptop. These resources are needed now more than ever. The more we continue to learn about the Holocaust, the more we will remember it. The more we remember it, the more we can ensure that it will not be repeated.

But what are some ways to show that we remember? In her lecture at the University of Tennessee, Mira said that it is important to protest and vote for moral causes. Signing petitions for these issues, and talking to legislators about them, is also important. Essentially, we must not stay silent when we see injustice. “When you stand back and say, 'this is none of my problems, it doesn't have anything to do with me,' then it becomes dangerous. Because not doing something, not protesting, means almost 'I agree with what is being done,’” Mira explained in her presentation to the Webb School. “If we do not vote, that means, 'I don't care what is happening,’” she continued later on. Those of us with knowledge of the Holocaust should remember not only in our minds, but also in our actions.

Mira spoke about the Holocaust in colleges, churches, and other settings. Her desire was that her listeners would never forget what she told them. She knew she would not live forever, and she wanted people to remember the Holocaust long after her death. “If only 1 or 2 percent of the people I have spoken to carry on the truth of the Holocaust, I will be satisfied,” she once wrote. “But will they do it?”

(Kimmelman 160). Mira's determination to spread her message showed that the Holocaust had failed to destroy her. In his introduction to *Echoes of the Holocaust*, Paul Bookbinder stated the following: "...Mira Kimmelman has succeeded in maintaining hope and rekindling a spark without ever losing the memory of what she saw and experienced. Hitler did indeed try to rob his 'enemies' of their humanity. In Mira Kimmelman's case he failed" (Kimmelman xxiv).

In closing, Mira Kimmelman's Holocaust experiences changed her worldview and helped her create her message of remembrance. Mira was truly a strong, determined, and remarkable woman. She would have turned one hundred this year. Though she is no longer alive, her message continues to inspire people from all walks of life. Mira remembered the Holocaust for us. But now, it is our responsibility to remember for our children.

## Works Cited

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