

Love and Humanity

“He held the door open for me and let me precede him and in that gesture restored me to humanity.” These are the words of Gerda Weissmann Klein as she recalls how Lieutenant Kurt Klein, her future husband, liberated her from a concentration camp.

As I scrolled through testimony after testimony, having the gravity of the Holocaust’s hardships and horrors bear down upon me, this testimony spoke to me like no other. The weight it carried was inescapable, replaying over and over in my mind. It amazed me how something as simple as opening a door could mean so much. How could it be that after all that suffering and pain all it took was this simple act of kindness to start putting the broken pieces back together?

This testimony showed me that the love we have for each other is one of the most powerful forces in this world. When I think of the Holocaust it makes me wonder; Why? Why did millions of Jews have to be tortured? Why did a people have to lose so much? I can see now that the answer lies within Klein’s quote. When Kurt Klein opened that door he wasn’t just showing kindness, he was showing empathy and equality that had been so brutally taken from Gerda. Kindness is truly treating people as human and when it’s gone we can see how hate leads to dehumanization. The smell of burning flesh and tears over dead loved ones was a reality for so many people all because of this lack of human kindness.

Therefore, Gerda’s testimony has inspired me to try and show compassion wherever I go and in whatever I do. Gerda has motivated me to be that person who picks up dropped books and tells my parents I love them. Sometimes it’s that little act of generosity that can make the biggest difference. A kind word may seem insignificant to me but it could mean the world to someone else.

I remember an activity a teacher had us do one day. We passed around sheets of paper with our names on them and had to write one nice thing about that person. Reflecting on Gerda’s story now, I realize that this wasn’t just another activity, but a reminder. It reminded us that we must never forget to show kindness because when we do not, it doesn’t only lead to pain and destruction, but to a loss of humanity.

As an African-American girl I can empathize with the feeling of having someone look at you but not see you. I know that sometimes all it takes is a smile from a stranger to make everything okay. As stories of war and hate-filled crimes burden the news, I hope that Gerda’s words are not only a reminder to me but to everyone of the power of kindness. No matter how big or small, our kindness has an impact beyond words. I know that I’ll personally start maybe ... by opening a door.