HOLOCAUST & HUMAN RIGHTS
ART & WRITING CONTEST
HIGH SCHOOL ART / POETRY
FIRST PLACE

LIZZY OSINSKI
Lizzy Osinski
Horace Greeley High School
10th grade

Title of work: Unluckiest Luck
Source: Night by Elie Wiesel

In my 10th grade English class at Horace Greeley High School, we read the book Night by Elie Wiesel. While I was reading, I couldn’t stop contemplating how to describe the luck of Elie and the other survivors. It was lucky that he wasn’t separated from his father; it was lucky that they were sent to a labor camp rather than a death camp; and it was lucky that Elie remained healthy enough to endure the most horrific circumstances—but how can we describe any of this as lucky? I wanted to further explore the word “luck” with this poem.

Unluckiest Luck

It began with a simple choice.
Left
Or right.

Left was the lucky side.
The people forced into slave labor
Who faced starvation,
And beatings,
And fear,
Were lucky.

The ones who lived with the reeking smell of burning flesh,
The sight of smoldering smoke,
The sound of excruciating screams,
Were lucky.

And the ones to the right?
They were the burning flesh,

And they were in the smoldering smoke,
And they made the excruciating screams.
The ones who lived in fear  
Rather than die in fear  
Were the lucky ones.  

It began with a simple choice.  
Left  
Or right.  
Live  
Or die.  

But the Jews did not make that choice.  
It was their enemies,  
Their perpetrators,  
Their murderers,  
Who made the choice.  

How lucky can a Holocaust survivor be?  
How lucky can someone who escaped the murder  
Of six million of their own people be?  

Getting stripped from your family  
Is not lucky.  

Living in hatred and fear  
Is not lucky.  

And surviving,  
Something that billions of people can do every day  
With no effort at all,  
Is not lucky.  

And so,  
With the unluckiest luck of all,  
Some people  
Lived.
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SECOND PLACE

CLAIRE NAM
Cathartic Reminiscence

“It was impossible to talk human, to be human, to act human, to express ourselves like a human being... I have no animosity... But I do hope for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren that life for them will be a little more humane.” - Helen Colin, Holocaust Survivor, USC Shoah Foundation

To revive the rivers spilling from ghetto cities, delusioned child chin sticky with bubbling blood skin taut over sedimentary bones.
To feel honey sugar coating my tongue, wash it clean of decaying fibers slip the ocean’s welled tear in my throat. Remember this: she killed her own crying baby yesterday, choked him quiet.
and we tried to look away as her arm stiffened harbored her sacrifice; I’d like to forget that.
To cleanse the streets of bodies limbs twisted in a tango of death.
To liberate me from smothering my nose under straw mattresses, watch infants tumble off the balcony push the mother down after.
To suffocate this air of loss. Remember this: mama said humanity could never harm another human being.
Remember this: daddy died with a loaf of bread and a prayer in each hand.
To run after my sister without shepherds lodging canines into heels. To flee the barbed wires of lipstick slurs and bile distilled of syllables. To reclaim dignity from the men who bathe us in chlorine.
To ask without consequence.
To love without consequence.
Remember this: brother’s skull split open at my feet, trenches in the flesh I ask myself every day why? why did this happen? I remember his crumb-coated fingers, touch them, intertwine them with mine at night. Yes.
I’ll even forgive that.
Artist’s Statement:
My name is Claire Nam and I listened to Helen Colin’s testimony. During Helen’s video, I was shocked by the vividness of Helen’s memories, and felt her pain when she spoke about her family. However, the most memorable moment for me was when Helen smiled and said, “I know no strangers because everyone I touch always remains a friend of mine. Because I love humanity! I still love human beings.” Helen’s desire to love everyone even after her traumatic experiences is truly beautiful. In Cathartic Reminiscence, I tried to capture her tragic memories and end with her willingness to forgive.

Sources:
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THIRD PLACE

ZOE HERMAN
The Mourner's Kaddish is the prayer that a Jewish person recites when a loved one has died. Ironically, the prayer is about exalting God, not about the dead. In *Night*, we see Elie Wiesel’s faith in his religion slowly disappear. Why would God let the Nazis commit genocide of his “chosen” people? In my artwork, *crisis of faith*, a broken Jewish star is surrounded by thousands of Jewish corpses. And we bear witness to this carnage through a veil of barbed wire, which evokes the concentration camps, which were surrounded by barbed wire to prevent their victims from escaping this horror.
I used the font used on the Jewish star that the Jews wore in my drawing.

I took the idea of an abundance of skulls from this political cartoon. I did not copy the exact design, and it was also meant for a different idea.
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HONORABLE MENTION

JANICE SEONG
Elegy of the Gallows

My memory works like clockwork, 
cogs whirling like the inner machinations of my mind.

I remember the emaciated children 
with gaping pothole eyes walking like corpuscles, 
massless particles along a straight line, 
pleading for morsels of food and wearing scraps of clothes. 
Pills of despair were lodged in their throats by men 
in gray baying for the spill of blood.

In the barracks, a man lay on his wooden bunk, 
unmoving and head lolling to the side. 
Papery, jaundiced flesh stretched over 
tissue and sinew, silent and unflinching. 
He oscillated between technicolor and grayscale as 
lacquered, antiquated eyes opened and closed slowly. 
He was the antithesis of living as the ground swallowed him 
and keeps its bloodstained secret.

My dreams, once smelling like manna and soup, 
were plagued by the man’s hollow face, 
and I wondered if I would be next. 
When I awoke, the warmth of sunlight crept in, 
shining through from the blemished sky. 
A sure-fire sign of a day renewed, 
of another body drained of vitality 
and another melancholy day of mourning.

The specter of my mother’s face etched 
with pain lingers in my mind 
like a phantom limb with its ephemeral presence. 
But there is no panacea for my memories, 
only remembering the elegy of the gallows.