HOLOCAUST & HUMAN RIGHTS
ART & WRITING CONTEST 2024
HIGH SCHOOL ART
FIRST PLACE

ADITI VIJIL
Birds

Crouching in the dark, crowded wagon,
   All i hear is sorrow
Echoing,
Reverberating,
Engulfing.
It is poison, the silent serpent leaving its trail
   of venom.

I am marched out of the wagon
And drown in a sea of men.
Crowds of people,
Their heads shaved bare
And pajamas striped
Possessions ripped from their hearts,
Each one a cut, a forever scar.
Numbers are etched upon our arms,
Each one a mark of what we’ve lost.
My free will.
My joy.
My peace.
    My humanity.
Gone.

Grief,
    As potent as a river
Helplessness,
    As vast as an ocean
And fury,
    as hot as a dancing flame
    Threatening to burn
    everything it grasps.
Constantly humiliated and hungry,
I knew the end was near
but I hung on to life.
My hope has started to drain,
Leaving in its place
A
Blood
Red
stain.

I glance upward and am escorted to a camp
“Auschwitz” it reads.
The grief in the air is tangible, and I hear a
string quartet playing.
I think to myself, “But they can’t stop birds flying over.”
“Despite the sorrow and heartbreak engulfing this camp,
They will fly over”
I searched the whole afternoon,
Yet there were no birds.
Not a single
One.
This poem is inspired by the life of Ibi Ginsburg, a young Jewish girl who was born in Hungary into a strictly religious Jewish family. She survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and a death march. She recounts how there was an orchestra playing when she first entered the camp, and she remembers thinking to herself, “But they can’t stop birds flying over”. She remembers searching for birds for the whole afternoon, yet she did not spot one. I took inspiration from this line, and as a survivor, her story is important to hear.
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SECOND PLACE

AADHYA VIJIL
Laughter
Bright, radiant, and peaceful
There was always love
In a family as boisterous and happy as ours,
How could there not be?

Listening to my father’s whistled tune
Saturday morning,
Just before breakfast
I whispered a secret
One day,
I will fly planes too
Just like you, Papa

A quiet stroll
Down the bustling streets of Hungary
The Caproni Ca.135 flew above us
A bomber, Papa whispered

But hand in hand with my father
I had felt nothing but safe

June of 1944
I was 17 years old
My father’s son
No longer a boy
Dreams and ambitions
Replaced with war and fear

The ghost of a happy past
Haunts me
Screams,
Agonized and tortured,
Pain me

My father and I
Heads shaved bare
Dreams no longer
Of trivial things
Dreams of peace
A home without war

Repeating each day
Who I am
Where I came from
Hoping this war
Hasn’t stripped me of my identity

Who am I?
I am 84007
And my father was 84008
My poem was inspired by John Chillag, a holocaust survivor's story. He recounts on the joyous memories before the war-- filled with family and love. Surrounded by children his own age and family members, he says he had a happy childhood. In June of 1944, his world changed forever. He and some of his family were put in cattle wagons and brought to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I based the poem on a phrase he said: “I am 84007, my father was 84008, my uncle was 84006.”