

Miley Roberts

Mrs. Sellers

8-3, Essay Contest

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### Light in the Holocaust

The story of Estelle Wakszlak Laughlin is particularly interesting and inspiring. Estelle suffered the unimaginable tragedies of the European Holocaust. Many other children were affected by these tragedies, but each one handled them differently. Uniquely, Estelle grew from her experiences and has a great character because of them.

Estelle was born in July of 1929 in Warsaw, Poland. The once-peaceful Warsaw is now known to be one of the most Holocaust-affected places (Berenbaum). Estelle began her life with her mother, father, and sister as a normal child playing, dancing, and singing. She says, in a first-person interview with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, that, "All these [childhood] memories, when I lost everything, became my possessions" (Laughlin). Estelle held on to the hope of her beautiful childhood memories when crisis struck in October 1940. During this time, filled with terror, Estelle and her family were forced to move into a 1.3-square-mile ghetto.

Estelle's hope of not having to go to a concentration camp was stolen during the Warsaw ghetto uprising when she and her family were forced out of hiding and sent to the Lublin-Majdanek concentration camp. When the Wakszlak family arrived at Majdanek, they were separated according to gender. Estelle, her sister Freda, and her mother Michla were assigned to forced labor, while their father was devastatingly killed in the gas chamber. The women pushed on, in hope for the future.

In likeness to the brutal actions of the Nazis, Freda was beaten terribly, causing her to not be able to work. She hid in the barracks because of her inability to work. She was later found and put on a list that she, her mother, and her sister assumed to be a gas chamber list. Courageous and selfless, Estelle and Michla switched with two other women on that list so that Freda would not die alone. This list was instead a list that would send them to another horrific camp in Skarzkyzo. They were later moved to a final concentration camp in Czestochowa.

Losing almost all optimism, the three Wasklak women were finally released from Czestochowa by the Soviet Union. They began a new life in allied-occupied Germany until they moved to the United States in 1947. Against all odds, Estelle fought the wants of the SS and met her husband, had children, wrote two books, and volunteered at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This took an unexplainable amount of strength.

Personally, Estelle's development through her life has impacted my view of the Holocaust by representing great characteristics of a person despite the struggles they were facing. Knowing a Holocaust-survivor's story, from their perspective, also gives me an awareness of the true disgust of what many people went through during the Holocaust. I believe that we hold the duty of knowing their stories so that we don't repeat that horrific event. Her ability to come through on the other side inspires me and should be an inspiration to others too.