**In Class Oral History Assignment – Eva and Denise**

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Listening to Eva Lang and Denise Hans share their personal stories of the Holocaust had a very strong impact on me. Although I know the history of the Holocaust, listening to the personal and painful first hand accounts of these survivors gave the history a much deeper meaning for me. I will never be able to understand how such a human atrocity was possible, and hearing the stories of Denise Hans and Eva Lang, both child survivors, helped me to understand that the trauma they suffered as children has a life-long effect, that they can never erase. In the words of Eva Lang, “we live a normal life, but we aren’t completely normal”

Eva and Denise had similar experiences during the war, in that they were both living in Europe when the war broke out. Eva was born in Belgium and Denise was born is Paris. Both women were separated from their parents as young girls, and they each had to fend for themselves, at an unnaturally young age. They were both given up by their parents and sent to new homes where they were forced to change their identity completely, for their safety. They had to take on a new religion, name and language. This experience left emotional scars on both women. They still remember the loneliness, fear and sadness of being torn away from their previously normal, happy lives. They still experience these feelings, as intensely as if they were still living this reality. I think as non-traumatized people age, their memories lose intensity, however, this is not the case for the child-survivors.

Eva and Denise both struggle today, to comprehend how Hitler and the Nazis were able to commit the murder of 6 million Jewish people, for no other reason than being Jewish. They are unable to understand on an emotional level what happened to them and that is very painful for them.

After the war was over, Eva and Denise waited to re-unite with their parents and their families. When the women, who were only girls at the time, understood what had actually occurred and that many of their family members were killed, they were horrified and even more scared than they were before. They also felt guilty that they had survived, with the knowledge that many in their families had been killed, burned and tortured to death was the hardest. Eva says, “… Not a day goes by where I don’t remember my family who died.” The grief and pain that they live on a daily basis is indescribable.

Eva’s parents were both killed in the Holocaust. Denise’s father was also murdered, but her mother survived. Denise, however, was not able to re-connect to her mother emotionally after the traumas they had both suffered. Despite the fact that Denise did not lose her mother physically, she felt that she lost her mother on an emotional level. Both Denise and Eva lost the most important relationships in a child’s life. Growing up without proper parenting made life very hard for both Denise and Eva.

Even after nearly 70 years since the Holocaust ended, Denise and Eva still have flashbacks and nightmares. They clearly remember the feeling of an empty stomach and the fear of being completely alone haunts them, even though they both have created new families. No matter how hard to move on and live normally, they cannot be totally normal. They cannot erase their horrific past, and there will always be a very scared little girl inside of them.

As I listened to Eva and Denise speak, I found that I could relate to them on a human level and very personal level. They were able to teach me a part of history that no textbook will ever be able to express. They made me understand in a very real way the unbelievable devastation caused by Hitler and the Nazis, and how this trauma continues to live with them everyday. The survivors taught me that their trauma did not end, just because the war did. Eva and Denise made me very aware that as a Jew it was only time and location that separated me from the holocaust. The survivors also taught me the importance of standing up for what is right even if it isn’t the popular choice. If more Germans had stood up against Hitler and his regime, maybe Hitler would have been stopped earlier. I know that I must do what is right even if it puts me in an uncomfortable and unpopular position. I also understand the enormous importance of sharing the story of the holocaust with the world. Everyone – regardless of race, religion or background -- can learn valuable lessons from the Holocaust. As survivors are aging, it is very important that younger people are able to share the history of the Holocaust. I know that I will do my part.