



Introduction to the theme for HMD 2016 “Don’t stand by”

The Holocaust and subsequent genocides took place because the local populations allowed insidious persecution to take root. Whilst some actively supported or facilitated state policies of persecution, the vast majority stood by silently – at best, afraid to speak out; at worst, indifferent. Bystanders enabled the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and subsequent genocides. They tolerated cultures where increasingly punitive and oppressive discrimination and hostile policies could separate populations and ultimately lead to ethnic cleansing, destruction and attempted annihilation of communities.

Those who did not ‘stand by’ whilst persecution took place were not only bravely acting as resisters and rescuers of individuals, they were also taking action against prevailing views and beliefs that saw some people’s lives as worth less than others’.

People who did not ‘stand by’ in the Holocaust and in subsequent genocides were able to assist in many ways. Some brave people saved lives, giving a home or shelter to individuals and families who tried to escape. Others organised rescue efforts, arranged safe passages or accompanied children to safety.

Elie Wiesel has written powerfully about the impact of bystanders:

I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. The world is a dangerous place not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.

Attributed to Albert Einstein

The term ‘bystanders’ covers a wide range of behaviours. Examples include people who: stood by and watched as Jews were forced to clean pavements during the Holocaust; benefitted from selling stolen Jewish property during the Holocaust; accepted oppressive and discriminatory policies without question;

Names ----- Form -----

You will work through the activities here in 2s, pair/sharing as you go

Starting point - Holocaust Remembered

- 1) In 2s spider diagram all that you know about the Holocaust



Actions of Rudolf Vrba

Rudolf Vrba was born on 11 September 1924 in Slovakia. In March 1942 he ignored orders to assemble for deportation to Poland. However, he was sent to transition camps, before arriving at Auschwitz I on 30 June 1942, where he was assigned to work at Auschwitz-Birkenau. After transports of Jewish people arrived and selections were made (with around 90% of the people being sent to the gas chambers) Vrba felt that 'the whole murder machinery could work only on the principle that the people who came to Auschwitz didn't know where they were going and for what purpose. Vrba took mental note of the transports arriving, their origin, and estimated the numbers killed.

In early 1944 he learnt that the Nazis were preparing for arrival of Hungary's entire Jewish population of around one million people, who were to be exterminated. Vrba saw that it was now urgent to escape to inform the outside world what was happening in Auschwitz. Vrba and his friend Wetzler escaped Auschwitz on the evening of 10 April 1944 and began an 11 night walk south to Slovakia, 80 miles away.

After crossing the border into Slovakia they quickly made contact with the local Jewish Council. They were separated and interviewed about their accounts of Auschwitz independently. A report was then written and translated into German and Hungarian, becoming a 40 page document.

Throughout his life Vrba felt that the leaders of the Hungarian Jewish community refused to publicise the Vrba–Wetzler Report to local Jews because of negotiations they were having with the Nazis to try to save some of the community. Vrba was appalled as 437,000 Jews from the Hungarian countryside were sent to Auschwitz and murdered between 15 May and 7 July 1944.

The Vrba–Wetzler Report was published in the press in Switzerland. World leaders made direct appeals to the Hungarian Government to stop the deportation of Jews. The deportations were halted on 9 July. Hitler was furious.

The Vrba–Wetzler Report was an important piece of evidence at the Nuremberg war crimes trials in 1946. Throughout his life Rudolf Vrba was somebody who refused to stand by. In the most extreme and appalling situation he risked his life to try to prevent the killing of hundreds of thousands of people. It can be argued that through their contribution to telling the world about Auschwitz the heroism of Vrba and Wetzler saved the lives of tens of thousands of Budapest's Jews.

Take turns to explain how you would feel if you were in the situation which Rudolf describes above.

2. The Story of Sir Nicholas Winton

Nicholas was born to Jewish parents in London in 1909. In 1938, a friend told Nicholas about Jewish persecution by the Nazis. Nicholas went to Prague to see for himself. Whilst there, he visited several refugee camps. His friends were working with an organisation to help relocate the adults, and Winton realised that something had to be done to rescue the children who were caught up in the situation. **He simply could not stand by.**

On *Kristallnacht* (9 and 10 November 1938), the Nazis had initiated a campaign of hatred against the Jewish population in all Nazi territories. An estimated 91 Jews were killed, 30,000 were arrested, and 267 synagogues were destroyed. Following this, the British government relaxed its immigration laws and agreed to allow in a limited number of children from Germany and Austria. This programme was known as the *Kindertransport*, and some 10,000 children were successfully brought to Britain.

Winton asked the British government to allow some Czech children to come into the UK as well; permission was granted if:-

- 1) The children had to have £50 from their families.
- 2) The children had to have a family in Britain to live with.

As Nicholas knew that it would be very difficult for the children to find these two things, alongside a few volunteers – including his mother – he worked tirelessly to arrange everything the children needed, including finding host families and raising funds to cover the travel expenses of the children. Winton was able to arrange for 669 children to come to the UK over the next few months, the majority of whom were Jewish.

During the war, Nicholas Winton became an ambulance driver, before joining the RAF. After the war Winton joined the International Bank in Paris where he met his wife, Grete. They had three children.

Years later, Winton tried to donate his papers, identifying the children, and matching them up to families, to an archive or museum. Shortly afterwards, Winton was invited to appear on *That's Life!*, a television show where, to his surprise, he was reunited with some of the children he had helped, including Vera Schaufeld. For most of the children, it was the first time they found out who had rescued them, and felt it was a real honour and privilege to come face to face with their rescuer.

Sir Nicholas Winton was an inspiration to many people, all around the world. He humbly insisted that anyone would have done the same. But they didn't. Most people stood by.

List the reasons why you think many people would have just “stood by”

Now list the reasons why you think Nicholas Winton wanted to help

3. The experience of Vera Schaufeld

Vera had a lovely childhood growing up in Bohemia, (now in the Czech Republic). Her father, Eugene, was a lawyer and a prominent figure within the Jewish community. Vera's mother, Elsa, was the first woman in her town to become a doctor. Despite being one of the few Jewish children in the local primary school, Vera was hardly aware of being a minority and it was not until the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia in March 1938 that she understood what this meant.

One day, after school, Vera's mother surprised her by taking her to a small park. She was told that she must go to England on her own. Trying to reassure her, Vera's mother said that she and Vera's father would try to join her in England as soon as they possibly could. When Vera arrived at Prague station, she was devastated to be told that the parents of all the children were not allowed onto the platform to say goodbye. 'My last sight of my parents was as they stood behind the barrier, waving their handkerchiefs, while I looked at them out of the train window,' she said. This would be the last time Vera would see either of her parents.

A Christian family agreed to take Vera into their home. They were called Leonard and Nancy Faires. Their daughter, Betty, was three years older than Vera and Vera remembers her as being very kind. Before the war broke out on 3 September 1939, Vera's parents would send her presents and they were even able to speak to her on the telephone. After the declaration of war, however, Vera had no further news of her parents.

When it was announced on 7 May 1945 that the war in Europe was over. Vera was ecstatic. She remembers thinking: 'This is wonderful. I shall see my family and friends soon.' It was after a trip to the cinema where Vera saw images from the concentration camps that she learnt no one in her family had survived.

In England, Vera had had very little contact with other Jewish people. For this reason, after training as an English Teacher, she decided to travel to Israel to spend a year working on a *kibbutz* (a communal settlement in Israel). Here she met Avram, who had survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Vera and Avram were married in 1952. They returned to England.

In 1972, Vera took the decision to use her experience of learning English as a child in order to teach English to a group of Ugandan and Kenyan children, who had recently arrived in Brent, London. Most of the children were of Asian descent and had been expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin – the then President of Uganda. Evidently, experience of being a refugee during the war had shaped Vera's life choices.

Give 3 reasons why you think Vera taught Ugandan refugees

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Think again about the 3 stories you have read about. If you could meet either Rudolf, Nicholas or Vera – which one would you choose and why?

If you could ask the person you chose above 2 questions what would they be?

1.

2.

“Don’t stand by activities” - activities

Situation - In addition to Jews, Europe’s Roma and Sinti (travellers) were targeted by the Nazis for total destruction:

Johann ‘Rukeli’ Trollmann was born on 27 December 1907 near Hannover into a German Sinti family. He took up boxing at the age of eight, soon competing with the Heros-Eintracht boxing club in Hannover and going on to win four regional championships and a North German championship as an amateur boxer before he was 20.

On 9 June 1933, Rukeli boxed against Adolf Witt for the German light-heavyweight title, which had been vacated by the Jewish holder Erich Seelig who had fled Germany in fear of his life. Rukeli was on course to win when the Nazi chairman of the boxing authority intervened, ordering the judges to call a ‘no decision’ and not award the title. This decision caused such an uproar among the audience that Rukeli had to be hastily crowned champion after all, but only a few days later he was stripped of the title again by the German boxing authorities because of ‘bad boxing’.

If you had been one of the Judge’s in this fight – what action would you have taken - would you have stood by – or spoken out against the unfair discrimination of Rukeli? Give reasons for your answer



More Recent Genocides

Genocide is defined as "the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group". Since the Holocaust, recent genocides are:-

1992-1995 Bosnia In the Bosnian municipality of Prijedor, non-Serbs were forced to wear white armbands. Serbian newspapers, radio and television stations began to publish and broadcast propaganda against the non-Serbs in the city. In a previously connected community, divisions were being drawn and neighbours were turning against each other and many were killed.

Propaganda = *information, ideas, or rumours deliberately spread to harm a person or group etc.*

Task - discuss and answer in 2s - what other forms of communication are now in existence that weren't in 1992 – 1995? What could make propaganda even more dangerous than before.



1994: Rwanda People affected by the Rwandan genocide are still having to share their communities with people who harmed them or killed members of their family. The state is imposing a law that forces everyone to get on – to coexist, forgive and reconcile.

Darfur - (2003 – Present date) Around 2.7 million people in Darfur are now displaced – they have been forced to flee their homes and now live in makeshift refugee camps. A further two million people rely on international assistance, bringing the total number of civilians affected by the conflict close to five million people.

Task The UK welcomes refugees seeking asylum into this country. After a period of assessment, many have their applications granted and become part of our community. Discuss how refugees enhance our community.

Review – in 2s what in your opinion, do we learn from remembering Holocaust Memorial Day?

