

The **11th** Annual  
*Tribute to the Rescuers*  
Essay Contest Awards Ceremony



Presented by



## ***Tribute to the Rescuers*** **Essay Contest 2013**

Since 1966, the Tribute to the Danes and Other Rescuers Organization has been educating the public about the actions of Danish rescuers during World War II. In 1999, the organization merged with the National Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which along with the Institute for Holocaust Education, seeks to educate the public about the Holocaust and contemporary issues related to the Holocaust. On behalf of co-sponsors, the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa and the ADL, and through the generous support of the Carl Frohm Foundation, the Institute for Holocaust Education is pleased to present you the winning essays from this year's *Tribute to the Rescuers* Essay Contest.

Moral courage is defined as the ability to take a strong stance on a specific issue and to defend it based on one's personal beliefs or convictions regardless of danger or threats to personal safety—physical, emotional, or otherwise. In Denmark during World War II, Danish citizens provided a unique example of courage and concern by jeopardizing their own lives to spare those of 7,200 Jewish Danes. Moral values and beliefs united Denmark and her citizens in their defiance of Hitler's commands and decrees. The Danes' courage serves as a model of triumph over adversity.

Using the story of the Danes and others rescuers as supporting material, students were asked to choose a historical person, group, or literary subject that exemplified moral courage and to relate it to contemporary or personal experiences in which morals and values helped guide actions and behaviors. There were over 500 essays submitted by students from four U.S. states. These included students from Omaha Public Schools, Omaha Catholic Schools, Lyons-Decatur High School, and students from South Dakota, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

Over 45 community leaders judged the essays using an anonymous judging system and state criteria rubric. The founders of the contest felt that the message the essay brings to the reader should play a large role in the judging arena. Winners all demonstrated the ability to transcend the facts and figures of morally difficult subjects, while bringing their point home to make it real and relevant to today.

The 2013 *Tribute to the Rescuers* Essay Contest winners immersed themselves in the subject matter and applied it to the lessons of the Holocaust and other difficult historical events. We are pleased to share with you the following essays.

## **2013 Tribute to the Rescuers Essay Contest Winners:**

### **9th-10th Grade Category**

*First Place:* Marie Wagner, VJ & Angela Skutt High School, Omaha, NE

*Second Place:* Jessica Grimmond, Burke High School, Omaha, NE

*Third Place:* Joon Park, Mount Michael Benedictine, Elkhorn, NE

### **11th-12th Grade Category**

*First Place:* Tamerea Marion, Central High School, Omaha, NE

*Second Place:* Audrey Luo, Watchung Hills Regional High School, Warren, NJ

*Third Place:* Ryan Wood, Central High School, Omaha, NE

## **2013 Honorable Mentions:**

### **9th-10th Grade Category**

Katie Hollenbeck, Burke High School, Omaha, NE

### **11th-12th Grade Category**

Jessica Vorthmann, Central High School, Omaha, NE

Zach Weingarten, High Technology High School, Lincroft, NJ

## **Teacher Recognition Awards**

*First Place:* Jen Stastny, Central High School, Omaha, NE

*Second Place:* Sherri Hoye, VJ & Angela Skutt High School, Omaha, NE

*Third Place:* Eileen Sullivan, Mt. Michael Benedictine High School, Elkhorn, NE

*Behind the Stories*  
**By Marie Wagner, V.J. & Angela Skutt Catholic High School**  
**9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, First Place**

Injustice exists all over our world today, in many forms. Countries often control their media in order to hide injustice from the rest of the world. But, sometimes there are reporters who have the moral courage to stand up to the government and tell the world of the horrors that are happening, and in the end help the people who are suffering. Journalists with moral courage, like Marie Colvin, tell the stories of the people without voices, protect them, and fight for them, because those journalists believe it is the right thing to do.

Marie Colvin was an American journalist who worked for the London Sunday Times. During her lifetime, she traveled all around the world, reporting on the stories that she considered important, big and small. She reported in Sri Lanka during the civil war, where she was ambushed and lost an eye in 2001. Colvin also worked in and reported on wars in Egypt, the Middle East and Africa. In February 2012, Colvin was working in Homs, Syria, where the government was bombing the city almost daily. Marie Colvin was given the option to leave Homs, but wanted to stay to continue reporting on the horrible things the government was doing to its own people. The day before her death, Marie Colvin had exposed lies that the Syrian government had told the world. Syria had claimed that there were military targets in Homs, but Colvin had shared the truth. ““There are no military targets here... It’s a complete and utter lie... The Syrian Army is basically shelling a city of cold, starving civilians”” (CNN Wire Staff). Colvin was killed in a bombing raid in Homs, Syria on February 22, 2012.

Stories like Marie Colvin’s are more common than first assumed. In countries where there is political unrest, newspapers are often raided, and the reporters arrested or killed. In 2012 alone, 90 journalists 6 media assistants, and 48 netizens and citizen journalists were killed (Reporters Without Borders). Closer to home, however, the consequences aren’t as drastic. Reporters often fight to get a

story printed if the newspaper deems the article risky. “It would be a truly naïve journalist at NBC who would expect his network to air a report on the hazards of low-level radiation emitted by nuclear reactors built by General Electric, which also owns NBC” (Borjesson 546). Stories that could be scandalous or speak out against powerful people of the area are often edited or withheld by newspapers in order to protect the paper.

Finding people willing to risk so much for someone else is hard to do. Today, people tell the story of survivors of the Holocaust, to teach this generation and the next about the horrors they went through. At the time of the Holocaust, many of those outside Nazi Germany didn’t know how horrible it really was for the victims. Once, in a speech Marie Colvin gave about the journalists who have been killed, she said “Our mission is to report these horrors of war with accuracy and without prejudice. We always have to ask ourselves whether the level of risk is worth the story” (Storm CNN). If people like Marie Colvin had gone in and exposed the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps and forced the world to confront it, the end result might have been different. When people see pictures of concentration camps or dying children in Syria, their reaction is different than if they are simply told that the leaders there are oppressive. In the 1940’s and now, the impact of having someone force you to face the true horrors of the world makes a difference.

Stories like Marie Colvin’s inspire me because of the light the media is often shown in today. Often, I see one-sided reports on politics, with every channel giving a slightly different story from completely different points of view. Marie simply told the world the truth without bias or prejudice. She didn’t let the power of the President of Syria or anyone else change her story. Colvin told the story that she believed needed to be told, even if that meant risking her life in places as dangerous as Syria. I think that someone who speaks out is just as courageous as the person that does the actual fighting. The stories of Colvin and other reporters like her have taught me that words can have a big impact, and can change the world. I believe, that armies can fight wars, but the sympathy of the world helps to win them, which is what Colvin gave to the people she wrote about. For two

generations my family has served our country and put their lives on the line, so we all understand the sacrifice these people make every day.

Reporters can change the world, simply by doing their jobs. Marie Colvin gave the world a picture of the horrors of the wars of this century, just like earlier reporters had of the horrors of the Holocaust. Moral courage doesn't necessarily mean fighting for something; it means simply having the courage to do what you believe is right. Reporters fight for their stories to be printed because they believe the people deserve to know about them. Marie Colvin and reporters in Iran and other controlling countries write about the injustices in our world. And some of them have made the ultimate sacrifice.

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*A Pledge*  
**By Jessica Grimmond, Burke High School**  
**9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Second Place**

The slamming of the car door at the gates of the zoo alerted Jan and Antonina Zabinski to the arrival of visitors. Quickly, Jan ran to the door to receive the newcomers and Antonina to the piano where she loudly played Offenbach's musical phrase, "Go, go, go to Crete!" signaling to the many Jews in hiding on the couple's property to slip into their hiding places among the zoo grounds. This was one of many terrifying situations this couple faced while protecting Jews during the Holocaust. Jan and Antonina Zabinski exhibited exceptional moral courage in safeguarding hundreds of Jews in their zoo.

The Zabinskis began their acts of moral courage after witnessing the terrible acts of the Nazi regime. First, all of the Jewish Poles, including their close Jewish friends, were deported to the Warsaw Ghetto. Then in 1939, the bombing of Warsaw damaged parts of their zoo (Max). Later on New Year's Eve, the Nazi zoologist Lutz Heck came to the zoo with the Gestapo and raided the zoo. They took animals for their own collections or they killed them. The Zabinskis thought "Nazi racism [was] devilish... although they were already assisting friends inside the Ghetto, they pledged...to help more Jews" (Ackerman 111).

The Zabinskis sprang into action. Via the Underground, their zoo became a "stopping place for those who escaped the Ghetto until their destinies were decided..." (Ackerman 114). Jan and Antonina had two different jobs in protecting the escaped Jews. Jan would go into the Warsaw Ghetto to help the Jews there, while Antonina would take care of the Jews that were staying on their property. During German occupation of Poland, Jan was the superintendent of the public parks; he used this position to get into the Warsaw Ghetto. Under the guise of inspecting the Ghetto's flowers, Jan brought food into the Ghetto to give to not only his Jewish friends but other Jews as well. He also used this opportunity to smuggle Jews out of the Ghetto ("Portrait"). Other fugitives arrived via

the Underground, with a “phone call, a note, or a whisper” to alert the Zabinskis of new arrivals (Ackerman 115).

Jan and Antonina housed Jews in the empty animal cages and about a dozen of the escapees lived inside of the Zabinski’s home. Antonina gave them animal nicknames depending on what animal enclosure they were staying in. While Antonina took care of the Jews, Jan was involved with the Polish Underground; he was a lieutenant in the Polish Home Army and a professor of the secret Warsaw University. Jan used his Underground connections to send guests that looked Aryan to other parts of Poland (Max).

In August of 1944, Jan participated in the Warsaw Uprising, fighting the German occupation. During the suppression, Jan was sent to a concentration camp. Antonina continued to protect Jews in his absence. At the end of the war, Jan was released and he returned home (Max). Despite the hundreds of Jewish lives they saved and their close involvement with the Polish resistance, they were not recognized as heroes until 1968 when Yad Vashem recognized them as one of the Righteous Among the Nations (“Hiding”).

Moral courage isn’t a common occurrence in humans. Moral courage is the ability to stand up and take action for what is believed to be right. What is right isn’t necessarily what others believe. Fitting in and being like everyone else is what most people strive to do. Fighting against the current of others’ opinions may invite judgment or harm. It’s much easier to stand back in the shadows and watch. Jan and Antonina Zabinski demonstrated moral courage when they didn’t stand in the shadows and watch their friends, among others, suffer and die, while many other citizens cowered in the shadows. They changed their whole lifestyle, sheltering, feeding, and hiding up to 50 Jews at once on their property. Saving hundreds of people is notable, but that’s not what moral courage is. The moral courage here was this couple risking their lives for both friends and strangers alike, and for taking action despite the consequence of imminent death.

In fourth grade, there was a girl in my class that no one liked, including myself at the time. She was a constant topic of ridicule because she spoke whatever came to her mind, even if it was rude. The other students in my grade teased her mercilessly, though I did nothing to stop it. Then one day at recess, I saw that three other girls in our class had cornered her on the blacktop, calling her mean names. I could see the scared, but defiant look on the girl's face from where I stood. The look she had on her face stuck in my head. I did not know how she could stand there and continually take abuse and still be true to herself. I mustered up what little courage I had, marched over to the group of girls, and got the mean girls to leave her alone.

That girl and I have been best friends ever since. Even with someone on her side, our peers still teased her, and they began to tease me too because I was her friend. My friend still gets teased once in a while, but it is much less severe than it had been before. Even today, I don't stand up to the teasing all the time. I sometimes look the other way and pretend I'm not listening when people tease her. That's something I am working on, to stop cowering when someone is wronged.

Moral courage needs to become a common human occurrence. More and more people need to stand out, unafraid to be different or to take action. Bystanders need to leave the safe confinement of their shadows and embrace the light that moral courage exudes. Jan and Antonina's story has taught me that I not only need to admire the morally courageous people, I need to be one, and be an advocate for those who do not have a voice and for those who are oppressed.

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*A Pakistani Spark*  
**By Young-Joon Park, Mount Michael Benedictine High School**  
**9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Third Place**

A man walked down the aisle, his head slowly turning to scrutinize the faces in each row—then, his gaze transfixed onto a girl in the mid-section of the bus. The man raised his weapon. Malala fixed her gaze onto the man’s eyes. The gun’s cold steel was leveled at her head. She was prepared. She had known that this day could come when she had started to voice her beliefs. “Death to the blasphemer.” A gunshot rang throughout the bus.

“Cowards die many times before their deaths,” wrote William Shakespeare. “The valiant never taste of death but once.” All individuals have a different set of values. In all values however, two things are important: valuing the cause of humanity and being able to defend it. Rarely do these two characteristics coexist in an individual. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, an armed Taliban gunman shot Malala Yousafzai at point blank range. The fourteen-year-old girl had been a political activist, bravely speaking against the Taliban agenda in Swat, her home city in Pakistan. She had the courage to step up to publicly advocate for women’s education and denounce Taliban atrocities, at a time when Taliban killings were commonplace in the streets (Walsh). To me, she is the paragon of moral courage – showing care for cherished values within your arm’s reach.

Malala’s life was not a continuous battle for justice from the beginning. As the daughter of a local school director, Malala was an obedient and shy girl who loved to play with her two pet chickens (Ellick). This all changed in 2009, when her father was approached by Abdul Hai Kakkar, a BBC correspondent, requesting a female volunteer to write about the Taliban occupation of Swat. After several denials from female school teachers, Malala convinced her father to let her write for the BBC (Peer).

Her father's acquiescence led to months' worth of journals on Malala's life under Taliban oppression. Throughout the extensive writing done under a pseudonym, Malala described her life under the oppressive Taliban regime, criticizing and questioning their initiatives of banning all girls from attending school (Yousafzai). Following her rise to prominence, she was given numerous accolades, such as the International Children's Prize and the first National Peace Prize of Pakistan. But the honor only fueled her determination to speak against the oppressed educational rights of women under the Taliban. The plethora of death threats by Taliban operatives posted on her social network account could not deter her endeavors. These intimidations only led her to accept the chairman seat of the District Child Assembly of Swat and to meet US Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke to implore care and support for the Pakistani people (Peer).

This news story first caught my ear while I was listening to the radio. "A Pakistani national hero, 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai, has been shot in the head in an apparent assassination attempt by the Taliban..." I disregarded it as I changed the station to look for music. But as the day went on, there was a recurring buzz in my head—a tinge of recollection that sparked, and yet, was gone. Then it hit me. I knew this girl. Three years ago, I had come across a BBC post while doing a research project. It was a journal by an eleven-year-old girl who was submitting entries to the BBC about her life under Taliban oppression. But I recalled something else. I recalled that I had laughed at her while reading the entries. I recalled thinking that she was ignorant. I recalled declaring that her desperate call to attention was futile: the world would not hear her. And yet, here I was, corrected. Tens of thousands of Pakistanis had poured onto the streets of Karachi, rallying against the Taliban attack. The world's media was abuzz, as the United States, the United Nations, and people all over the globe condemned the vile attack conducted by the Taliban (Craggs). From the depth of her small town of Swat, Malala's small voice had been heard by the world

Those who display moral courage do not start with grandiose plans. Saving humanity, abolishing nuclear warheads, or throwing out their lives like worthless dry grass was not the starting

point for the heroes of the Holocaust, nor for a fourteen-year-old Pakistani girl. Their starting point was minuscule—within their community, within their circle of friends, and within their families. Moral courage is the willingness to defend the cause of humanity. But showing concern is not always easy. Sometimes the cost of courage is pricey. The headline read, “The Girl Who Wanted to Go to School,” and under it, there was a picture of Malala. Pakistani combat surgeons held the stretcher where Malala lay, a bandage wrapped around her head. I asked myself: would I have the courage to do what she had done for her friends and her community? The answer was not clear in my head.

However, one thing was clear. As the heroes of the Holocaust had to their following generations, Malala lit a spark in my heart. Her courage to stand up against a relentless tide of injustice has lit countless hearts all over the globe. Her fight, a fight that started with an eleven-year-old girl’s voice, has been heard by the world—from the people of Pakistan to a boy in Nebraska. And this spark that was lit can ignite into a flame when our values are in danger. Malala has left me with a beautiful obligation—the obligation to keep the spark that she gave me burning in my heart. Everything—even the Taliban bullet that was once lodged in Malala’s head—failed to extinguish Malala’s flame. Malala has not tasted her death yet.

“I think of it often and imagine the scene clearly. Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong, that education is our basic right.” -Malala

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*Malala's Moral Courage*  
**By Katie Hollenbeck, Burke High School**  
**9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Honorable Mention**

In a world full of tragedy and cruelty, very few people have mastered the ability of rising up for a better life. The majority of people stand back and watch as immoral acts go on unchallenged, due to the human nature of selfishly fending for only yourself. It takes an amazing amount of moral courage to stare danger in the face, and do what's right no matter what. When nobody else will take the risk, it is the people who exhibit moral courage that make a positive change in the world. They put others first, unphased by the consequences and looming threats of danger. These heroes, such as Malala Yousafzai, give the world hope and happiness when evil is abundant.

Malala Yousafzai, a fifteen year old girl from the Swat Valley in Pakistan, has an astounding amount of moral courage. Malala grew up under the malicious terrorist rule of the Taliban. Life is extremely difficult for young girls in her hometown, due to the Taliban's harsh regulations on women's education rights. The Taliban burned hundreds of schools in her home, and slowly began prohibiting Pakistani girls from getting an education. Everyday Malala lived fearing that she could be kidnapped, mugged, or even killed for going to school. Malala recalls such struggles as "Only eleven students attending my class out of twenty seven. The number decreased because of the Taliban's edict" ("Malala" par. 2). While education is so taken for granted in America, for Malala and other Pakistani girls, school is a privilege. The ban on education was so hard on Malala, that she altruistically decided that she wanted to make a difference, not only for herself, but also for other girls her age ("Malala").

When Malala was merely eleven years old, she began writing an anonymous blog for BBC depicting all of the struggles the Taliban were causing in Pakistan. She thought that if the rest of the world knew about the hardships she faced, they would do something to help. She told all of the stories of war, poverty, and death that she saw daily, just on the way to class. When word came out

about her school's closing, Malala wrote to BBC, "The girls were not too excited about vacations because they knew if the Taliban implemented their edict, they would not be able to come to school again" ("Malala" par. 11). People across the world began to take notice of her blog, and awareness began to rise about the difficulties in her home, thanks to her voice. By the time Malala was just twelve, she began appearing on television and was interviewed countless times about the struggles in her home involving the terrorism, all while becoming a well-known women's education activist ("Malala").

Things were getting better in Pakistan now that the horrible reality had been told, but Malala's good deed did not go unpunished. The Taliban became very angry at Malala for letting the word of the distress they were causing leak out of Pakistan. Feeling threatened by Malala's exposure, the Taliban attempted Malala's assassination in October of 2012. Malala was shot in the head three times by a soldier who had been sent to end her life and her education campaign. Malala knew that this attack was coming. By standing up for what she believed was right, she knowingly put herself right in the line of fire, worrying only about her campaign instead of her safety. Thanks to multiple emergency surgeries, Malala miraculously survived the attack, and is planning on continuing her work. Malala knows that the Taliban will likely come after her again, but she isn't letting this stop her (Schifrin).

Malala's moral courage is very similar to what was possessed by the many heroes from the Holocaust. One specific man of this bravery, named Rudolf Vrba, acted for humanity in almost the same way Malala did. When Vrba escaped from the Holocaust death camp Auschwitz, he told the world of the horrors hidden behind the camp walls. He knew that the Nazis would potentially kill him for the exposure he released, but he ignored this fact so that other lives could be saved. Just like Malala, it was a simple choice for him to take a risk to speak out that could ultimately end his life, all just to make things better for others. No matter the time period, the empathy and strength shown by these heroes is something that people everywhere should strive to have ("Rudolf").

I hope that in my future I can be as passionate for good as Malala is. I think that taking a bullet for what you believe in like Malala did is the ultimate example of moral courage. However, to have this level of selflessness, an act this extreme isn't necessary. In my everyday life, I try to perform little acts of moral courage and think of others before myself. I strive to be kind and stand up for kids at school that are being made fun of, no matter what other people might think of me for it. If I can make one other person's life better, that's more than valuable to me. The passion that Malala has for education is so inspiring, that one day I can only dream of having as much strength and drive for helping others as she does. I want to be able to believe in my choices enough to take a risk to give my all for and fight for something just like she does. Even if I don't make a world-wide difference in hundreds of lives, small acts of moral courage are honorable and certainly worthwhile for me.

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*Ethics and Moral Courage*  
**By Tamarea Marion, Central High School**  
**11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, First Place**

There is an ethical code humans have. It is not something we are necessarily born with; however, it is developed over time throughout adolescence into adulthood. It is simply a sense of right and wrong. We have a decision to make when we find ourselves in a situation that challenges that. We can go against our code or we can do what we believe is according to our ethics, the right thing. When something goes against our ethics and infringes upon the rights of others, we must do something, but that takes courage. Combine ethics with courage and it is moral courage, which is much greater than standing in the face of adversity or protesting evil. Moral courage is standing up for what one believes in when there is nothing to gain and possibly everything to lose. A person who would risk his/her life for the freedom to be who he/she is without fear and sacrifice everything so others can do the same has moral courage. Frank Mugisha exemplifies that definition.

Frank Mugisha is an openly gay man in Uganda, a country where being a homosexual or engaging in any sexual activity with the same sex is outlawed. He is leader of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) which advocates for the rights of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning) citizens. Currently, the Ugandan government is working on a bill to make homosexuality punishable by death or life imprisonment. This bill also includes punishment for anyone who knows a homosexual and does not turn them in as well as anyone who speaks out in defense of any LGBTQ people. The “Kill the Gays” bill was first introduced in 2009 and could pass any day now. When Mugisha spoke on the issue to [Huffington Post](#), he bluntly stated, “If the law is passed the way it is right now, I would go to jail, and I would be killed” (Mugisha).

Frank Mugisha and SMUG’s advocacy for the human rights of LGBTQ Ugandans has been remarkable. He has spoken out against the homophobic leaders of his country and made great moves to stop the “Kill the Gays” bill. SMUG has lobbied and worked with other human rights groups to

campaign against the government's plan to disgrace and dehumanize homosexuals. Mugisha displays moral courage because he does what is not easy. Homosexuals and their advocates in Uganda are often ostracized. SMUG's only supportive religious leader in Uganda, Bishop Christopher Ssenyonjo, was disowned by the church when he came out in support of homosexuality (Mugisha). Mugisha risks losing the support of friends and relatives for being gay and helping others like him. Any day, he could be killed not only if the law passes, but possibly by angry ultra-religious Ugandans or radical supporters of the anti-gay bill. Knowing what is at stake, he continues to fight daily not just for himself but for all LGBTQ Ugandans to have the same freedom and rights as everyone else. Frank Mugisha has given a voice to the LGBTQ people who have been silenced by their oppressive government.

I am a lesbian teen in America. It is much easier and safer for me to be public about my sexuality in my country; however, it is not easy to deal with the people who fear or hate me because of whom I love or to whom I am attracted. I cannot imagine what my life would be like if I could not be open about who I am, for fear of being detested by my family and peers, jailed or murdered. I admire Frank Mugisha because he is saving lives and risking his own life by fighting for LGBTQ people. It is amazing that he even had the courage to come out as a gay man in his incredibly homophobic country. It inspires me to want to do more to help LGBTQ people who are not as fortunate as me, like those who may not have been able to be open about their sexuality or those who have been abused or degraded for it. The world needs more morally courageous people like Mugisha who will persevere and sacrifice to defend their ethics and protect others.

The hateful actions of the Ugandan government are echoes of the Holocaust and the Nazis' hatred. Along with homosexuals, the Nazis campaigned to persecute and terrorize Jews, Sinti-Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, mentally and physically disabled people, and political opponents. Over 100,000 men were arrested under a law against homosexuality and around 50,000 were convicted while an "unknown number were institutionalized in mental hospitals" or castrated ("Nazi").

Between 5,000 and 15,000 homosexuals were held captive in concentration camps, many of whom were beaten, murdered, or starved to death or died from disease or exhaustion. A significant amount of people did not survive this time of terror, but because people stood up for their ethics, a small percentage of the victims of the Nazis were liberated. Today, 70 years later, in a country far from Germany, homosexuals still must live in fear and secrecy. One would think that after such a monstrosity so long ago, people would be against persecuting others. Unfortunately, there is still ignorance and hate in Uganda and around the world. Frank Mugisha is a hero simply by being open about his sexuality and speaking out against injustice. People who did the same, who spoke out against evil and inequality, saved so many lives and helped end the Holocaust. Not everyone has the courage to put a stop to such moral degradation. Without Mugisha and people like him who will defend their ethics and save lives, Uganda could be headed towards genocide.

*Minnie Vautrin: the American Goddess of Nanking*  
**By Audrey Luo, Watchung Hills Regional High School, Warren, NJ**  
**11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Second Place**

In the face of evil, many people remain passive or shy away in fear of what consequences resistance will entail. There are, however, rare individuals who, rather than avert their eyes, actively fight against injustice at the risk of their own lives. They can judge, decide, and act according to their moral code and have inclusive perceptions that transcend race, religion, and ethnicity. Amidst the brutality of the Nanking Massacre during the Second Sino-Japanese War, Minnie Vautrin, also known as the American Goddess of Nanking, protected thousands of women from ruthless Japanese soldiers who threatened to rape or kill them. As one of two-dozen Westerners who remained in war-torn Nanking to form the International Committee for Nanking Safety Zone, Minnie conquered her

fears and relied on her sense of duty to Chinese civilians who confronted the violent Japanese soldiers.

The Nanking Safety Zone was created in 1937 and sheltered hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians whose homes the invading Japanese had ravaged. These civilians were caught in the crossfire between Chinese and Japanese militaries. Most Westerners fled from Nanking in fear for their lives. The few who remained behind were urged by American embassy officials to board the *USS Panay* and move upriver, away from Nanking to safety. Minnie Vautrin refused to leave. She had been the dean of Ginling Women's Arts and Science College, whose faculty all fled Nanking at the beginning of the massacre. She opened the gates of Ginling College, which was inside the Safety Zone, to women and children. Though she knew she would witness atrocities and brutality that would haunt her for the rest of her life and endure the constant fear of being raped or murdered, she also knew that as a foreigner, the Japanese soldiers would be less willing to harm her, and thus she had the power to protect Chinese refugees in the Ginling College.

Genteel and scholarly, Minnie had no experience facing Japanese soldiers who threatened her with freshly bloodstained bayonets or slapped her across the face. She directly saved the lives of several male Ginling servants whom the Japanese mistook as Chinese soldiers and planned to execute. Only when Minnie asserted, "No [Chinese] soldiers—coolies!" (Chiang 132) were the servants freed. On New Year's Day 1938, Minnie saved the life of a girl who was seized and dragged by a Japanese soldier into a bamboo grove. When Minnie tried to stop soldiers from looting, she found a gun aimed at her. Despite the physical perils and mental torture, Minnie remained steadfast in her mission to protect the refugees. She even found the strength to reassure others, promising, "China has not perished. China will never perish. And Japan will definitely fail in the end" (Hu 100).

As Minnie jeopardized her own safety to protect Chinese refugees in the East, rescuers in the West, like Miep Gies, Charles "Carl" Lutz, and John Weidner endured similar trials and faced difficult moral decisions to save the lives of the prosecuted Jews. Miep hid two Jewish families from

the Nazis, risking her life to act in consonance with her conscience. Lutz, a Swiss vice-consul in Hungary in 1942, issued tens of thousands of protective letters that could cost his career, or worse, his life. John Weidner was tortured by the Nazis to reveal the identities of the Jews he led to safety from Holland, through France, to neutral Switzerland and Spain. All these rescuers and Minnie had several things in common: they took great risks for the safety of others and did not allow racial or religious differences deter them from doing so. They all could have chosen to be bystanders and escape physical and mental torture. Yet they were compelled to help others, feeling the way Weidner repeated over and over to interviewers: “I had no choice.” (Weidner 1) To a Japanese sergeant who demanded her to leave the Nanking Safety Zone, Minnie defiantly said, “This is my home. I cannot leave here” (Hu 93). To these rescuers, moral courage was not heroic but rather ordinary and necessary.

As I researched Minnie Vautrin and her acts of courage, I wondered why she did not just say, “That’s not my problem,” and leave Nanking like rest of the foreigners. Why did she take such great risks? Wasn’t she afraid? What would I have done in her position? By sacrificing her own safety and enduring such a harrowing experience, Minnie saved thousands of lives. I may not live in war-torn China or Nazi-controlled Germany, but I have the capacity to make the effort and take the time to help those less fortunate. This past summer, I volunteered at Samaritan Homeless Interim Program with a sense of duty to people whose lives had no similarity to my own. There, desperation was inebriation by mouthwash, so I included no Listerine in care packages. Loneliness was what the retired history professor drowned in at home when was not there discussing Lincoln’s life with me. Love was celebrating with Garcia over landing a landscaping gig that will pay for his bus ride to see his granddaughter in Virginia Beach. Those at SHIP may have previously dwelled in the periphery of my world, like the victims of the Nanking Massacre were to Minnie before the war, but I have the power to alleviate their suffering and inspire others—as Minnie has—to do the same.

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***Janusz Korczak; Hero and Teacher***  
**By Ryan Wood, Central High School**  
**11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Third Place**

When most people think of a hero, they may think of a towering soldier or perhaps a lone warrior poised for combat. It is very unlikely that they picture a scrawny bespectacled man with barely enough height to clear a picket fence; but seventy-one years ago a man like this proved to us that bravery can come from just about anyone. Although Janusz Korczak did not fight battles or lead charges, on August 3, 1942, he showed as much strength, valor, and bravery as the most courageous of soldiers.

Henryk Goldszhmit was born in Warsaw on July 22, 1878. He grew up in poverty but always sympathized with those less fortunate even if he was not much better off himself. As an adult, he had promising careers in both medicine and literature but in 1912 gave up both to establish a Jewish orphanage by the name of Dom Sierot. He adopted dozens of children and the pen name "Janusz

Korczak” as well. Dom Sierot was his temple of compassion; it was a home for orphans ages seven to fourteen and at one point even offered a summer camp to its inhabitants ("Janusz Korczak"). It was obvious to any outsider that Korczak cared for these children as if they were his own and in a way they were.

Although his career in literature was over, Korczak still put his considerable talents to work publishing many pieces on children and some even for them. *How to Love Children, Spring and the Child* and most popular among his orphans *The Fairytale of Konig Hanschen* were all written using his newest pseudonym, “Janusz Korczak”. He wrote, “Yes indeed, I salute those youngsters with my eyes and thoughts and with the question: what are you, what wonderful mystery is there deep inside you? I salute you with my determination” (Janusz 120-124). This is a passage from his acclaimed composition *How to Love a Child* in which he expresses his methods on rearing his beloved orphans in their most impressionable state. It was clear that his love and fascination for children were unparalleled by anything else in his life.

Dom Sierot was undoubtedly one of the best places for an orphan to live at the time. That is until 1939. On September 1, 1939, Nazi forces invaded Poland and occupied Warsaw. The notorious Nuremberg laws were created which imposed brutal restrictions on the Jewish people and made life for the orphans at Dom Sierot not as jovial as it had once been. No longer could Korczak write kids’ stories or run summer camps. He was forced to spend his hours begging for donations of food to give his orphans. He received a surplus of offers to smuggle him from the country and away from danger. He denied all offers to escape Nazi tyranny. He refused to leave the children he had devoted his life to protect.

In 1940, the Warsaw ghetto was created and the population of Dom Sierot doubled to an astounding 200 occupants ("Janusz Korczak"). Then on August 5, 1940, a day that would become a black spot on the already tarnished fabric of history, the entire orphanage was deported and sent to Treblinka, one of the most infamous death camps ("Janusz Korczak"). Hundreds of children marched

towards their imminent doom and at the front of the throng was their leader, father and teacher, Korczak. That day he joined his orphans unbidden and unnecessary but solidly present. As they boarded the cattle cars, they did not appear to be a mass of terrified victims but disciples following their teacher willingly into the next life. He died alongside the children he cherished, perishing in the gas chambers with them so that they would not have to be alone when they faced the end ("Janusz Korczak").

The subject of persecuting helpless individuals due to their differences hits home especially hard for me because it just so happens that my brother is severely Autistic. For as long as I can remember, I have been my brother's keeper, protecting him from all possible harm: to see someone so innocent suffer would be unbearable. I can truly understand the pain Korczak went through, watching his beloved orphans struggle to survive. To witness those you love being oppressed and knowing that they cannot protect themselves would be far worse than to suffer the same fate yourself. I would do anything to save my younger brother from peril and in a way he is my own orphan. Just as Janusz Korczak forfeited his life to comfort the helpless children whom he loved, so too would I pay the ultimate price to save my innocent brother.

The Holocaust was one of the most tragic atrocities to ever happen in human history. It is during these times of great evils, though, that the most remarkable people stand up for justice. They are people like Korczak, who know that they must stand up for what is right even if they stand-alone. Korczak died a teacher but this does not mean that his lessons of compassion and empathy died with him. His legacy continues to inspire goodness to all those who are familiar with his story. It is so remarkable that a single man can possess so much bravery in the face of so much persecution. Now that I know this man's heroic story, I believe I have two obligations: to pass on his tale of tragic sacrifice to the generations that are to come and to live my own life with as much empathy and compassion as he once did.

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***The Engineered Savior***  
**By Jessica Vorthmann, Central High School**  
**11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Honorable Mention**

The Holocaust is a time those involved will never forget and an event about which those of today will continue to learn. In itself, it is one of the most horrific genocides known to man, with its death count totaling over eleven million. The Holocaust was filled with evil and murder; however, buried underneath the darkness, there were saviors. These people were trying their best to do what was right and help others. These rescuers were not always as obvious as one might think, either. Many were just regular people and some even once belonged to the Nazi Regime, but they all showed moral courage, a quality many claim to possess but one that very few actually exhibit in a time of need. These saviors are those who stood up for what was right during this time when the Nazi threat said stay seated.

One man who refused to stay seated and silent against the Nazi regime was Hermann Friedrich Graebe. He was born in 1900, in Grafrath, a small town in Germany. While he was growing up, Hermann's family was poor, his father a weaver and his mother a domestic helper. Despite hardship, Graebe managed to marry and become a licensed engineer by the age of twenty-four. He

had originally joined the Nazi party in 1931 but was soon discouraged with the movement. Then, when he openly expressed displeasure and criticized the Nazi campaign, he was jailed for several months. Luckily, he was released without trial. Afterwards, Graebe started working for the Josef Jung construction company and that is when the story of one man's bravery begins (*Hermann Friedrich Graebe - The Righteous Among the Nations – Yad Vashem*).

In his beginning years at the Jung Company, he was sent to supervise a project on Germany's western border and then to report to the Reich Railway Administration in Lwow. His job was to recruit construction teams to build and renovate structures for the expansion and upkeep of the railways. Throughout this project and his next, he was responsible for enlisting over five thousand Jewish men, women, and children. Not long after his involvement with the company, he became witness to the mass murdering of thousands of Jewish families that were then cruelly thrown into a pit. Later, he would testify in the Nuremberg Trials, giving his account of the horrible act. Unlike most, Graebe reacted quickly. Appalled by this incident and others, he set out to save as many Jews as he could, and, in the process, risked his own life. He did not think twice, but only did what everyone should have. He began by accepting more projects than necessary to hire more refugees and even started an imaginary scheme. Called "Poltava", this assignment was a made-up project in which Graebe took Jews to escape and to take shelter. He did this all with his own money and resources. This was very dangerous for him as he transported them in his own car, but, without a second thought he did it. This shows his bravery in a time when he would not have been missed, but instead another body in the pit. Graebe was truly a hero and to those thousands he saved he will always be remembered (Affidavit of Hermann Friedrich Graebe).

Hermann Graebe initially interested me because I have always been interested in architecture and engineering. I have always wanted my work to do more than provide beautiful, functional structures; I also have always wanted it to help people and change the world. He used his work to provide shelter, warmth, and the probability of life to thousands. What he did was truly amazing. I

could change the world and help others, but nothing compares to being someone's savior and a savior is something he can truly be named. He put his life ahead of others without thinking twice even when he had already had a taste of the Nazi hatred. He did what was morally correct, what was truly inspirational, and what not everyone would or could have been able to do in this situation. Although he may not have used his engineering skills, he used his heart, which is even more important. I hope one day I can affect people this way with not only my work but also my heart like Hermann Graebe had.

Moral courage is bravery, it is heart, and it is doing what is right. Hermann Friedrich Graebe was truly an inspiration to me, but there are thousands of others who showed the courage that he did. Graebe had managed to save thousands through his work and with his own resources. He sacrificed his well-being and own comfort in his life for others. He is an idol and a true hero. He showed me a new way to help people through work with my heart that otherwise I would have thought implausible. Hermann Friedrich Graebe is a part of the memory that will never be forgotten in the dreadful Holocaust, but also the key to memories made by those he saved.

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***Raoul Wallenberg- A True Hero***  
**Ryan Weingarten, High Technology High School, Lingarten, NJ**  
**11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Category, Honorable Mention**

It is easy to talk of courage, to watch heroic acts on the television and decide that any decent human being would have acted in a similar manner. But when faced with the finality of death, how many people would truly risk their lives for a worthy cause? True moral courage is not simply an idealistic proclamation; it is actually acting on one's beliefs despite the risk of physical or emotional repercussions. The risk is no longer theoretical; it's very real, and very dangerous. To stare death in the face each day and devote one's life to saving others is an incredibly noble undertaking, and it requires extraordinary amounts of courage. There are a select few people who are selfless enough and brave enough to do this, to spend their days improving the world one act at a time with no regard for personal risk or reward. Raoul Wallenberg was such a man, and he saved the lives of over 100,000 Jews in the process.

Born in 1912 to a prominent Swedish family consisting of bankers, and industrialists, Raoul Wallenberg had his life mapped out for him from the day he was born. He received a thorough education in both Sweden and the United States, studying architecture at the University of Michigan and graduating with top honors. It was evident from his academic performance that Wallenberg was a talented, intelligent man, and it appeared that his life as a successful architect or banker was all but assured. After returning to Sweden, Wallenberg entered into a business venture with Koloman Lauer, a prosperous Jewish businessman from Hungary who was also involved in a developing plan to save Hungarian Jews from the Nazis. The relationship between Lauer and Wallenberg would soon lead to Wallenberg's involvement in the rescue effort and would change the lives of more than 100,000 men and women, including his own.

In 1944, Koloman Lauer attended a meeting with the War Industries Board to elect a leader for the rescue mission they were planning. Lauer nominated Wallenberg for the post due to his

courage, empathy, and intelligence, and after some brief deliberation the nomination was accepted. The head of the Board was “struck by [Wallenberg’s] passion... He liked the way Wallenberg’s mind worked, his unusual grasp of human nature” (Martin 40). Wallenberg, disgusted by the crimes against humanity that the Germans were committing, quickly accepted the mission and traveled to Budapest. Once he arrived he immediately got to work, distributing Swedish protective passes that gave the bearer immunity from the Nazis. In addition, he established the Swedish Houses, a group of thirty buildings he declared to be Swedish territory that secretly housed more than 15,000 Jews. When Wallenberg discovered that “[Adolf] Eichmann planned a total massacre in Budapest’s largest ghetto... the massacre was stopped at the last minute thanks to Wallenberg’s actions” (Metzler). Wallenberg was not afraid to use bribery and threats to save lives; his mission was to save Jews by whatever means necessary, and he carried out his task admirably. He would go to great lengths to distribute his protective passes, and when things began to look bleak, “Wallenberg intensified his rescue actions. He would even climb on top of [freight cars full of Jews] and hand bundles of protective passports to their occupants... [then] demand that those Jews who had received his protective passports be allowed to return to the city with him” (Metzler). Sometimes Wallenberg was even fired upon by German soldiers during his efforts. No threats could deter Wallenberg, however, and he continued to do everything in his power to help save lives.

After all he did for so many people, Raoul Wallenberg deserved to live a full and happy life and to be showered with recognition and praise for his heroics. Instead, the life of the man who saved over 100,000 innocent people ended in a prison cell. Suspected of being an American spy, Raoul Wallenberg died in Russian captivity in 1947. He was one of the bravest men to ever live, and he died like a criminal. In fact, Raoul Wallenberg was such a brave man that I believe if he knew what his fate would be he still would have chosen to follow the same path. When a friend told Wallenberg that he was in danger and should go into hiding, Wallenberg responded: “to me there’s no other choice. I’ve accepted this assignment and I could never return to Stockholm without the knowledge that I’d

done everything in human power to save as many Jews as possible” (Larsen). Raoul Wallenberg had the courage to follow his beliefs despite the risks, and he is an inspiration and role model.

I feel a sense of personal gratitude towards Raoul Wallenberg. A few of my relatives were able to escape from Europe during the Holocaust, but many more were not as lucky. My grandmother, a Belgian holocaust survivor, has told me about the atrocities she witnessed during that dark time, and it pains me to think that more than six million people were subjected to the misery and terror of the concentration camps. I feel a connection to every Jewish man, woman, and child who perished under Hitler’s reign of terror, and a sense of joy for every human being who was spared the atrocities that befell many of their friends and family members. The idea that one man was able to help so many despite stiff opposition from the Germans and personal danger is incredible. “[Raoul Wallenberg] went and proved that one man could make a difference... [Just] the mention of [his] name was enough to stir life into the half dead” (Marton 6). He sacrificed everything to preserve the lives of others, and every Jew, whether Hungarian, French, or German, owes him their undying gratitude.

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