

Dear Grandson,

Oxford, January 13, 1953

You must be very surprised to find this letter from me, since I usually prefer a good conversation. This time, it's different. Your father told me you have been working on a history project about the War, and then I knew the time had come that I should tell you my story. My story, about what happened to me. It's quite some time ago, I hope I can remember everything like it was.

Your grandmother must have told you that I serviced in the army during the period that Hitler started the war. Suddenly, I was sent to fight for my country, together with thousands of others.

'I don't want to be late!'

'I don't want to either.'

I took all my stuff and went into the car while my father started the engine.

I was only a few days over there when a German soldier took me prisoner. Together with a lot of my companions they put me in a large POW-camp. One day, I sat before the wire, it was morning, very early. Next to our camp there was a concentration camp. I saw a German soldier and two small children walking in front of him. I looked at them and wondered where they were going to, and what a German soldier intended to do with two innocent children.

The journey took about an hour, all that time my father and I sat next to each other, none of us saying a word. That was the relationship between my father and me. Just saying nothing. With our silence we always found the way to say everything that couldn't be said with words. I'm not sure if he felt the same way about it, but I do think so.

Suddenly, the soldier changed his way and came to me. He looked at me, through the wire. I asked him what he wanted of me. He didn't say a word, at first. He played a little with his gun, and looked at the children. A boy and a girl. Both about the same age, around ten I guessed. Both looking very poor, very innocent, their eyes looking frightened from me to the soldier.

I asked the soldier again what he wanted. He began to talk with a strange, deep voice. 'Do you know these children? Have you seen them before? Do you think they are of any value?' I wanted to run away, but he took his gun and pointed at the children. 'The choice is yours, which one should I kill, the boy or the girl. Now you can choose about life. One is going to live, one is going to die.'

It felt like my heart suddenly didn't beat anymore. I looked to the faces of the two children, innocent, involved into this war. For a moment, I couldn't speak. Then I said: 'I won't choose one.' 'Then I kill them both. Shall I? No point.' I turned around. 'You must let them both live.'

He smiled. 'Ah, afraid of choosing? Really? Well, still - you'd better save one of them. You can't save both. Which one, the boy or the girl?' I saw them looking in panic at me, both begging me: 'Choose me, choose me!' Couldn't save both. Could only save one, the boy or the girl. The boy or the girl.

I couldn't resist anymore, I screamed and ran away. The soldier laughed at me. I quickly ran behind a barrack. Just before I was inside, I heard two shots, loud, and cold. Two shots. A few hours later, I went back to the wire. The two children were lying there, before my feet. Blood everywhere around me, their eyes open, seeking for me, begging, with their silenced scream. I knelt and screamed for them, as loud as their voices could never have been. And I washed away the blood of their faces with my tears.

Next day Americans liberated us, but I was still prisoner, even now, as I will always be. Remember this, my son, and take it with you.

Your Grandfather

When my father had opened the door I ran into the house, yelling: 'We're here!' I finally found him in the study, sitting on a chair, leaning backward, and almost invisible, a few drops of blood on his gray pullover. I looked at the floor and saw the gun. On the table stood the writing machine. The next moment my father entered the room.

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