

2014

Reflective Insight: "Survivors"

Thomas Tucker
Old Dominion University

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Recommended Citation

Tucker, Thomas (2014) "*Reflective Insight: "Survivors"*," *OUR Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal*: Vol. 2 , Article 18.

DOI: 10.25778/qqa1-cp49

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/ourj/vol2/iss1/18>

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Thomas Tucker

Survivors

I chose to go on the French Holocaust trip because I had never been out of the country, and I also wanted to learn more about the Holocaust. I never would have imagined that I would get to experience the things that I did. From meeting with a Holocaust survivor the first night, to seeing the Płazów concentration camp that was depicted in the movie *Schindler's List* the whole trip was an eye opening experience for me. One of the best moments that I had during the trip was meeting with the Holocaust survivors. These survivors definitely left an impression on me because they have lived through this horrible experience and are able to tell their stories to others.

Monsieur Altmann was one of the Holocaust survivors that I met the last day in Paris who told us his life story. He is this older gentleman who one can tell was a fighter in his day. In fact he was a boxer in his young adult life. He explained to us that he was seventeen when he was arrested for tearing down antisemitic posters, but while the guards went on lunch break, he stole a uniform and a bike and rode all the way to another city about forty miles away. He knew he could not go back to Paris, but he was eventually detained by the police again. This time the police chief who caught him was head of a Resistance cell, and in this way M. Altmann began working for the Resistance. He started giving out false papers to Jews so they would not be deported, but eventually he was caught and sent to the Drancy internment camp where after a period of time he was deported to Auschwitz. While at Auschwitz, he worked in the *Sonderkommando*, those units of prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoriums. After liberation he weighed only about 64 pounds, but he fought on to stay alive. He received a blood transfusion by an African American soldier, one of the first black men he had ever seen. He stayed in touch with that man all his life and even visited him in New York City. Now he educates students like us about the Holocaust.

Mr. Altmann inspired me because he overcame death so many times and did things that I could never imagine doing. To me this was the best part of the trip because I was able to learn from those who lived the history and do as M. Altmann asked; tell others his story so that we never forget the atrocities that were committed.