

Promise to Remember
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Survivor Testimony: Elly Kamm

In 1994, Lois Lowry won the Newbery Award for *The Giver*. During her acceptance speech she explained that her dad was in a nursing home and was losing his memories. Lowry told her audience that her father's memory loss contributed to her book because she learned that forgetting memories of pain made things more comfortable. More importantly, Lowry revealed that the situation made her ask whether or not forgetting was safe.

Through her testimony Elly Diament Kamm teaches it is absolutely NOT safe to forget. Even though her memories sometimes bring her to tears, it is clear that Elly wants to remember. She wants to remember and wants us to understand.

The most poignant memory that Elly shared was the memory of the last time she saw her mother. Because they were not considered strong enough to be of use, Elly's mother and younger brother were ordered to leave the ghetto on a death train. Mrs. Diament knew her daughter wouldn't leave her. Therefore, she decided to trick Elly.

While Elly and her mother waited for their train, Mrs. Diament pretended to remember that she had forgotten her good shoes. Mrs. Diament told Elly that she would need those shoes since it was cold and one of her shoes had a hole. So, like the good daughter she was, Elly went to get her mother's shoes.

With her mom's shoes in her hands, Elly stood "all alone" at the depot. Her mother was gone. Elly would never see her again. The tears and agony that go with that memory are devastating to watch. Even though I know that Elly's life has a happy ending, the memory of watching a grown woman go back in time and transform into an abandoned little girl will always be with me. It was like seeing all the black and white pictures of World War II change into color.

After Elly's testimony, I looked at pictures of my grandparents and tied Elly's memories to my memories of them. My grandfather smoked cigarettes for many years and was proud of himself for quitting. He didn't quit early enough. After six months of fighting for life in the hospital, my grandfather died.

He had been married to my grandmother for almost 50 years. They had nine children and many grandchildren. Once he slipped into a coma, he couldn't respond to anyone. We all visited

him but wondered what he was thinking or if he even remembered us. The last time I saw him, my grandfather looked very sad, like he knew it was over.

Elly's testimony reminded me that I need to remember all the times I had with my grandfather so I don't lose what we had.

The survivors of the Holocaust are the Givers of their memories, and we have been selected as receivers. Like Jonas in Lowry's book, we need to do something with those memories. On behalf of all of us, I say to the survivors, in the words of Lowry's community, "We thank you for your childhood."