

Name: _____ Class: _____

It's For You to Know That You Forgive, Says Holocaust Survivor

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Eva Mozes Kor (b.1934) is a Romanian-born, Jewish American survivor of the Holocaust and founder of the organization CANDLES. In 1944, Eva and her family were forcibly transported to Auschwitz, where she and her twin sister Miriam were subjected to not only the grim conditions of the concentration camps but medical experiments, as well. Seventy years later, Eva Kor testified against a Nazi guard on trial for his war crimes. As you read this text, take notes on Kor's philosophy about forgiveness.

- [1] Around this time 70 years ago, following the liberation of Nazi concentration camps in Europe, the world was coming to grips with the scale of the Holocaust, and how to deal with crimes so horrendous, they're almost incomprehensible.

That process is still ongoing.

Right now in Germany, a 93-year-old former Nazi who served at Auschwitz¹ is on trial. Holocaust survivor Eva Kor flew to Germany to testify about her experience in the camp.

"If there would be hell on Earth, Auschwitz looked to me like that and in some way it was," Kor says. "Within 30 minutes, my whole family was gone... I was left orphaned not knowing really what will become of us."

- [5] Kor says she was "between life and death" and used in brutal medical experiments. She and her sister Miriam were among the thousands of twins subjected² to horrendous experiments by the infamous³ Dr. Josef Mengele.⁴



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Eva became gravely sick, and says Mengele examined her and declared that she had only two weeks to live. "I knew he was right, but I refused to die," she says. In 1985, she found out that had she died, Mengele would have killed Miriam with an injection to the heart in order to do comparative autopsies.⁵

1. perhaps the most well-known of German Nazi concentration and extermination camps
2. **Subject (verb):** to force someone to go through something painful or unpleasant
3. **Infamous (adjective):** someone or something that is well-known because of something bad
4. Josef Mengele was a Nazi doctor who experimented on people imprisoned in the concentration camps. Twins were considered useful in his medical experiments; one twin could be used as an experimental subject and the other as a control.
5. an examination done after someone dies to determine how and why they died

"My diseased organs and Miriam was the control. I spoiled the experiment," she says.

Seventy years after all of this, she was approached to testify in the trial against former Auschwitz guard Oskar Groening. At first, she wasn't sure she wanted to, but an attorney convinced her. But she says she thought it would be a "unique experience" to face one of the guards from Auschwitz.

"[To] tell him what I think and also hear what he has to say in a German court," she says.

- [10] Kor says the experience for her, a survivor of Auschwitz who used to be called a "dirty Jew," to sit in a German court and be treated with respect by German judges and attorneys and the German court system was a little bit surreal.

"I could at times pinch myself."

Oskar Groening has been called "The Accountant of Auschwitz." He managed the money and valuables stolen from the concentration camp victims. Now 93 years old, he is charged with 300,000 counts of accessory to murder, but once said that he was "just a small cog in the killing machine... not a perpetrator."⁶

Kor talked with Groening after her testimony, wanting to thank him for acknowledging his crimes. She decided she wanted a picture with him, and as she proceeded to talk with Groening, he grabbed her and pulled her in for a hug and a kiss.

"[It] surprised me, but I recovered from it," she says.

- [15] The photo of Kor seeming to embrace the former Nazi shocked a lot of people.

And some — including some fellow survivors — were upset by an interview on German TV in which Eva spoke of forgiveness. She says her comments were translated incorrectly.

"There have been rumors that I have asked to stop prosecution of all Nazis and that is 100 percent incorrect," she says. "On the contrary, I want all Nazis to come forward and be prosecuted and stand trial and bear witness to help us, the survivors, and the world with the truth."

But if she were the judge, she wouldn't throw Groening in a prison cell.

She'd make him travel the country to talk to young neo-Nazis, and tell them what he saw and that the Nazi regime should never come back.

- [20] For Kor, forgiveness does not mean that the perpetrators are absolved of their crimes. She is the founder of the CANDLES (Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors) Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Terre Haute, Ind., and she speaks across the country about her experience and the power of forgiveness.

6. **Perpetrator** (*noun*): someone who commits a crime or evil act

"My forgiveness... has nothing to do with the perpetrator, has nothing to do with any religion, it is my act of self-healing, self-liberation and self-empowerment," she says. "I had no power over my life up to the time that I discovered that I could forgive, and I still do not understand why people think it's wrong."

Kor says that when a victim chooses to forgive, they take the power back from their tormentors.⁷ But that it is their choice to make.

"They can take a piece of paper and a pen and write a letter to someone who hurt them," she says. "Please do not mail it to that person. It's for you to know that you forgive, and you can go on with your life without the burden and pain that the Nazis or anybody else ever imposed on you."

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7. **Tormentor** (*noun*): someone or something that causes a lot of pain and suffering

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central idea of the text? [RI.2]
 - A. Kor believes that forgiving a Nazi guard helped her cope with her experiences in Auschwitz, and others can empower themselves by doing the same.
 - B. Kor's experiences in the trial convinced her that survivors should first be able to face their tormentors in person before they can forgive them.
 - C. Holocaust survivors, and other victims of violence, are obligated to speak up in court so that they can seek justice for the wrongs done to them.
 - D. The worst kind of punishment, besides prison, is preventing tormentors from seeking forgiveness.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answers to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "I want all Nazis to come forward and be prosecuted and stand trial and bear witness to help us, the survivors, and the world with the truth." (Paragraph 17)
 - B. "But if she were the judge, she wouldn't throw Groening in a prison cell" (Paragraph 18)
 - C. "For Kor, forgiveness does not mean that the perpetrators are absolved of their crimes." (Paragraph 20)
 - D. "Kor says that when a victim chooses to forgive, they take the power back from their tormentors." (Paragraph 22)

3. PART A: What does the word "surreal" mean as it is used in paragraph 10? [RI.4]
 - A. uncomfortable
 - B. unbelievable
 - C. frustrating
 - D. overwhelming

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "[To] tell him what I think" (Paragraph 9)
 - B. "called a 'dirty Jew'" (Paragraph 10)
 - C. "be treated with respect" (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "I could at times pinch myself." (Paragraph 11)

5. How do Kor's experiences at the trial relate to her ideas about justice? [RI.3]

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. If you were Kor, would you be able to forgive like she did? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that Kor is smart or foolish for forgiving Nazis like Groening?
3. In Paragraph 12, Groening says he was “just a small cog in the killing machine ... not a perpetrator.” In what ways is this a good defense, and in what ways does it fail? What happens when people are just “cogs in the machine” and follow the crowd?
4. As a part of her plan to move forward, Kor says that former Nazis should travel and speak to neo-Nazi groups to help make sure this never happens again. How do people prevent terrible crimes from happening in the future? How do people create change?