

## Henry Ramek, z"l, Memorial Essay Contest 2019

5<sup>th</sup> Grade - First Place: Essay by Miriam I.

*Prompt: What do you think it means to have moral courage?*

Imagine you are at lunch and you see a few students picking on a first grader. Would you look away and just let it happen or would you stand up for the first grader and try to stop the bullying? If you were to stand up for the first grader you would be acting with moral courage. Moral courage is the act of being brave and standing up for what you believe in, even when you risk your social acceptance or personal safety. Moral courage is really important to have because people need those helpers and you need to be brave and help those who are in need. I believe Helen Fixler exhibited a lot of moral courage during the Holocaust.

Helen Fixler was an ordinary teenager who lived in Poland. One day, Helen noticed through the window that the Germans were coming and she ran and hid in the corner, petrified. Within a week the Germans had taken over her city. Eventually, Helen and her family were moved to ghettos. A rumor spread to Helen's dad and he told his family that the Nazis were going to round up all the Jews and kill them. They fled the ghetto that night and hid in the woods. The winters were horrible and there was barely any food, so they were lucky if they found a rotten potato. Helen was really miserable and sometimes she even wished she could have been killed.

One and a half years later, the Ukrainians found them in the woods and killed most of the families. Helen and her dad were part of the eleven or twelve survivors, but her dad was wounded and they hid in a haystack in a barn for six months. Every night, Helen would try not

to get caught while going down to the creek to get a few rags wet to put on her father's wound. The creek was covered in ice so Helen had to break the ice with her swollen, barefoot feet. The farmer's wife found out they were hiding in the barn and was sympathetic, without telling the farmer, who would have turned them in. The wife would occasionally sneak them the extra food scraps after meals.

We have been talking about the rescuers in class, and I think Helen Fixler was herself a helper because she was using moral courage. She would go out every night and get the rags wet with the chance of getting caught and being killed. She has taught me to always to stand up for what I believe in, to face your fears even in the worst of times, be brave and don't let your fear hold you back.

In first grade, we read a book called "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" by Carol McCloud. Filling someone's bucket means treating them with kindness. I think this book connects to Helen Fixler and your everyday life because you should try to fill someone's bucket every day with an act of moral courage, however big or small.