

The Stars Among Us

The streets of Poland were filled to the brim with soldiers in green Army jeeps. The soldiers had come to conquer the town, but told everyone not to worry that they meant no harm. I knew that wasn't true when I saw what was on the side of their jeeps. On the side of their jeeps was the mark of the Nazi's, the swastika. I knew that my life might be about to change. My life was about to change because I am Jewish. My name is Jakub Siegal and this is my story.

My friend Kamila and I were walking through the packed streets of Poland on our way to school. We passed house after house while walking the cobblestone, path. Kamila and I were talking, laughing, and having a great time when we looked past the school and could see a convoy of vehicles coming right for town. We were so curious about vehicles that we waited outside the school to watch them pull into town. That's when I saw the green jeeps filled with soldiers, but the thing that really caught my eye was the swastika on the door. Fear shot through my body. I had heard many stories of how the Nazi's hated the Jews and blamed them for the world's problem. Kamila and I had been friends long enough that she could tell that something was bothering me.

"What's wrong Jakub ? You look as if you have just seen a ghost!" Kamila said trying to get to the bottom of what was bothering me.

"Nothing!" I replied loudly.

"I was just worried about you. I didn't mean to make you mad," Kamila replied with a sad look on her face.

"I know. I am glad to have a friend like you. I didn't mean to yell at you just then. It's just. Well....I am not having that great of a day," I told her feeling kind of badly about having to lie to her. I had never lied to Kamila before and it bothered me that I had to do it now. I just

didn't want her to worry about me and my family. I quickly changed the subject.

"Are you ready for Miss Gregor's class today?" I asked her trying to keep the conversation light.

"When is anybody ready for Miss Gregor's class?" Kamila asked with a little sarcasm in her voice.

"You have a point there. I don't think anybody can ever be ready for her class because she is always, so full of surprises," I told her with a laugh.

"CLASS! Please take your seats. It is time for your lessons to begin," Miss Gregor said in a voice that made everyone plop in their seats. "Today, class, we are going to start off with our history lesson," she said pulling the map out for all the students to see. "This is where we are," Miss Gregor said pointing to Poland. "And here is Germany. This is where the soldiers are from that a lot of you saw pull into town today," she said. A blonde boy in the back of the classroom raised his hand.

"Why are they here Miss Gregor?" Hans asked as he looked outside the room's window where some of the German's jeeps could be seen.

"I am not sure Hans. I have heard the Germans have been going into countries and taking out all the Jews because they blame them for the state their country was in after the first World War," Miss Gregor said. My hand went up this time.

"Why do they blame the Jew's for their country's problems?" I asked genuinely wanting to know why my people were hated.

Miss Gregor twiddled her thumbs while she thought for an answer. "I think it is because they were looking for someone to blame and they saw the Jews as an easy target. Adolf Hitler, the leader of Germany, is the one who got told the Germans that the Jewish people were to blame

for the Depression their country was in after the war. Hitler also told them that the Jewish people were not to be trusted," Miss Gregory said with what I thought looked like a sneer on her face. "Children. I think that is enough of history for a day. Open your books and read the story on page 82."

I opened my book and honestly tried to read, but my mind could not focus. All I could think about was what Miss Gregor just said about the Germans taking all the Jews out of the country. Where were they taking them to? Why were they taking them? Could it be that they plan to take all the Jews away, somewhere far from Poland? Is it possible that is why the Germans pulled into town today? I just don't understand. I looked over across the room to where Kamila sat. She sat there reading and I could tell that she was really enjoying the story. She had a smile on her face and she stared intently at the book as if she couldn't wait to read about what was going to happen next. Then, I heard Miss Gregor's voice.

"Is everyone done reading the story?" she asked the class.

"Yes," Everyone, but me, said in unison.

"Ok. Well, now I want you all to write an essay on what you thought about the story," Miss Gregory said with a smile. That is when the recess bell rang. We all ran outside to play in front of the school in the fenced-in area. Kamila and I decided to play soccer. While we were kicking the ball back and forth we heard a noise coming from the middle of town. The noise we heard was a voice and it was definitely not Polish it was German. The Germans were yelling and telling everyone not to worry, but they were in charge of things in Poland now. My heart started to pound inside of my chest. I didn't know what I was going to do. I had never really told anyone about my family and I being Jews. The reason I had never really told anybody about me being Jewish because well, it really never had come up in a conversation before. Kids, don't

really talk to their friends about things such as that. I started thinking to myself, *So maybe that means that Germans won't find out either!* The bell to come back inside the school rang and I was glad to hear it. I walked with Kamila quietly back to the classroom.

"Children. Did you enjoy your break?" Miss Gregor asked with a smile.

"Yes," everyone said with as much enthusiasm as possible.

"Well," she said. "Let's finish up today with your math lessons," Miss Gregor said as she was walking to the long, black chalkboard. Miss Gregor wrote ten math problems on the board. "Jakub, I want you and Kamila to come up here and answer these problems. The five problems on the left are for Jakub and the ones on the right are for you Kamila," she said pleased that she had caught Kamila and I off guard. When I heard Miss Gregor say my name I decided to put the thought of the Germans possibly taking my family and I away out of my head because I wanted to live a normal life. *Nobody knows that my family and I are Jewish, so what do I have to worry about anyway,* I thought to myself.

As soon as Miss Gregor finished giving the directions to Kamila and I, I raced to the board to answer the problems. I had to beat Kamila to the board because if I didn't get a head start on her she would have them all answered. I wouldn't even get a chance to think about the answer to the first problem if I didn't beat Kamila to the board. I had the first one answered when Kamila finally got to the board. I was trying my hardest to beat Kamila, so I focused really hard. All of a sudden I heard someone knocking on the classroom door. *Knock. Knock. Knock.* My curiosity got the best of me and I turned to see who was at the door. My loss of concentration cost me because Kamila put down her piece of chalk and I knew immediately that she was done, but that didn't bother me because at the door stood a big, tall German soldier. He was looking over the class with a piece of paper in his hand.

"This here piece of paper that I hold in my hand has all the names of all the Jews in this school on it and when I call your name, come to the front of the classroom immediately!" the German soldier said with a sneer. "I have something for you," he said sarcastically. I stood there frozen in fear not knowing what to do. I thought to myself, *Is my name on that list? Do they know I'm Jewish?* The German started reading the names from his list. Dominik Rosen was the first name that was called. It seemed as if it took Dominik forever to walk to the front of the classroom. When he finally got to the front of the classroom the soldier asked him to hold out his arm. I closed my eyes because I feared what was about to happen to him. After, I didn't hear any screams I decided to that it was safe to open my eyes. There it was the Star of David on his arm. The German soldier told him that he had to wear it at all times and if he ever took it off he would have to pay the consequences. The soldier got back to reading the rest of the names off of his list. The fear came back to me again only this time its presence had a stronger hold on me. "Kinga Cohen, Aron Katz, and.... Jakub Siegal," the soldier ended. I tried to keep my head held high as I walked to the front of the classroom to get my armband. I watched as the soldier went down the line and placed armbands on each of our arms. My turn came last and I looked around the room while the soldier put my armband on me. As I looked around I saw that some of my classmates looked as us with sadness in their eyes and others looked at us as if we were exactly what the Germans were saying, we were nothing but someone to blame for the world's problems!

Anger ran throughout my body and I ran right past the soldier and out the classroom door with tears streaming down my face. Kamila saw me and she started to run after me with tears in her eyes also. I was running as fast as I could to get away from the school, to get away from the awful glances. That's when I tripped running down the school's stairs. After, falling down the stairs I didn't have the strength to finish out running home, so I just sat on the bottom step not

knowing what to do anymore. Kamila finally caught up to me and she sat down on the bottom step and we began to talk.

"Why did you not tell me that you were Jewish and that it was possible that you might be in danger?!" Kamila asked in desperation.

"At first, I never told anybody because it never came up in the conversation, but when I saw that the Jewish people were in danger it was then that I decided it was best to keep me being a Jew to myself. They found me anyway as you can see," I said pointing to the Star of David armband on my arm. They have us marked now with this armband, so they know exactly who the Jews are. "I am now being watched by them!" I screamed. "They can take my family and I away at any moment!"

"I won't let them take you or your family. I will do everything that I can to stop them from doing so," Kamila said. "I don't think that it will come to that though. I am sure that this will all blow over in a little while," she said, but I knew that was not really what she thought. She was just trying to lift my spirits and give me hope.

"Let's go home," I said trying to smile.

"Ok," she said with one tiny stipulation. "Only if you come to my house for dinner tonight."

"No promises," I said with a somewhat faint smile on my face. "I might have to be with my family tonight."

"I understand," she said. "Well, if you can come, we would love to have you."

I walked her to the door of her apartment in town and was telling her goodbye when she surprised me by giving me a kiss on the cheek. I walked away with a smile on my face not knowing what to think about the kiss. *What did it mean? Does she like me? I have liked her since*

the first time we met. Does she share those same feelings? That was what was playing over and over in my head.

I got to the door of my faded, white house on the outskirts of town and opened the door to see that my mother and father was there waiting for me at the table.

"I see that the soldiers found you today, son," my father said pointing to the Star of David that was now on my arm.

"Yes, father. They have located all of us to the best of my knowledge. What do you think is going to happen to us?" I worriedly asked.

"Son, I am not going to lie it does not look good for us, but that doesn't mean that we should give up," my father said proudly. "I have worked out a way to where our family is going to get out of Poland tonight. A Jewish sympathizer has informed that the Germans plan to get the Jews out of Poland and take them to concentration camps, so that is why we have to leave tonight!"

"Who is the Jewish Sympathizer? What is a concentration camp?" I asked my father.

"Son, I promised my informer that I would not tell anyone who he is," my father said. "And son, I will not bother you by telling you what a concentration camp is, but let me tell you they are awful."

"How are we going to get past all of the Germans in town," I asked questioningly.

"There is no way that we can get past all of them soldiers," I said without giving my father time to even answer my question.

"They are looking for people with the Star of David on their arms and we will not have our armbands on. We are going to Sweden because my informer told me that they hide

Jews," father said.

I looked around our humble home. I hated to leave our home, but I did not want my family to die. Mother, Father, and I quickly put a few things together in a bag. We put our armbands under the floor boards of our house and then rushed out into the night to face our destiny. We met three German soldiers on our way through the town and we breathed a sigh of relief when they did not stop us to ask questions. I begged my parents to stop by Kamila's to tell her goodbye. They said that I could as long as I kept my visit short and sweet. When we finally came upon their house I walked up to the door and knocked. Kamila answered the door and she seemed pleased to see me.

"I knew that you would come tonight," she said sounding very pleased.

"I am sorry, but that is not why I am here. I am here to tell to see you for only a minute and then I have to go," I told her trying not to let my voice go out.

"I see," she said sounding very disappointed. "Well, I guess I will see you at school tomorrow."

I could see the hurt in Kamila's eyes. She did not understand what was going on and I couldn't tell her. She began to close the door, but before she closed the door I kissed her on the cheek. I wanted her to know that I cared for her just in case I never saw her again. She put her hand up to her reddening cheek and slowly closed the door looking at me the whole time.

My family and I started on our journey to Sweden our "Canaan Land." It was a perilous journey and there were many close calls for us, but we were one of the lucky families that made it. Sweden was great! There were no worries about the Germans coming for us because a Swedish family took us in and hid us in there attic. My family and I were able to live a secret life up there in that attic. After, living in that attic in Sweden for three years we finally got word that

the war was over. The sad news was that a lot of Jews had perished at the hands of the Germans and we mourned those that were lost, but we celebrated the lives of those that had survived.

I decided to go back to Poland because I had to see if Kamila was still there. I needed to know if she cared for me. The journey back to Poland seemed to be a lot shorter than my journey to Sweden had been three years ago. I guess it was because I was anxious to get home, but most of all I think it was because I had to see Kamila. When Poland finally came into sight, I could see that it was just like I remembered it. I walked through the town until I came to Kamila's apartment. I stood at the door until I finally mustered up enough courage to knock on the door. *Knock. Knock. Knock.* I could hear the footsteps coming to the door and when the door opened there stood Kamila. She pushed the door aside and immediately embraced me. I knew then that she had cared for me just as I had cared for her.

Kamila and I looked up at the stars it was our favorite thing to do together.

"See that star there," I would tell her. "That is only one of the stars among us."