

1945

by Novia L.

Elizabeth fingered the Star of David necklace her sister had given her. It'd been seventy long years since her death. Since her parents' death. Since her sister's death. Since she'd lost her entire family. She could still remember as clearly as if it had been yesterday...

November 5, 1944

9-year-old Elizabeth Katz was fast asleep next to her sister when suddenly, she awoke to hear loud pounding on their door and a man shouting in German. Her parents jumped out of bed and woke her sister. "Run! Don't let them find you!" her mother whispered. "And whatever you do, don't let them know you're Jewish!" Her 15-year-old sister nodded with tears in her eyes and hugged her parents one last time. She took Elizabeth's hand, and ran through the back exit just as the thin wooden door splintered and five armed Nazis stormed into the small hut. Gunshots echoed through the alley. Elizabeth tried to tug her hand away from her sister's, but her grip was strong and she dragged Elizabeth into a pile of debris. "Martha! They're killing Ima and Aba!" Elizabeth cried softly. "Elizabeth, we have to survive!" Martha replied fiercely as a tear rolled down her cheek. "If we don't, their sacrifice will have been for nothing!"

A week later, Elizabeth and Martha were captured while trying to steal a loaf of bread. "Don't move!" a soldier shouted in German. Another two soldiers roughly shoved them into a nearby train car.

After a few hours, the train doors slid open and they were dumped onto the ground in front of a white building. They were brought inside and a woman dressed in white came up to them. She began talking to the soldiers in German and she took a sample of their blood, then dragged them to a large group of girls standing apart from a smaller group of them. They were again pushed into a train, and got out at an ugly brick building—a concentration camp. First, the girls were sprayed with a stinging liquid that removed their lice. Then, they were forced into a line and had to give some officers their information. Martha gripped Elizabeth's hand tightly. "Don't let them know that you're only nine," Martha whispered urgently to Elizabeth. "Tell them that you're older so they'll think that you're useful and keep you alive." Elizabeth nodded slightly, then stepped forward to tell the officer her information. "Name?" the officer said in a bored yet stern voice. "Elizabeth Katz," she replied evenly. "Place of origin?" he asked. "Leipzig, Germany," she responded somewhat truthfully. That had been where she'd been born, and where her family had lived before the war. "Birthday?" the officer inquired. "December 16, 19..." Elizabeth hesitated. Should she lie about her age, like Martha had said to do? Yes, she trusted her sister. "...1931." The officer nodded and gestured for her pass to the next room as he interrogated Martha.

May 12, 1945

It had been 6 months since Elizabeth and Martha's capture, and Elizabeth had grown used to the days of nonstop working and the nights of troubled sleep. Elizabeth had been lucky, and she'd been assigned to work in the kitchen. Every now and then, she could slip a few vegetables back to her dorm and share them with her sister. Martha, however, had been assigned to metalworking, and every night when she came back to the dorm, she was covered from head to toe in metal dust.

One day, during lunchtime, a black metal object dropped into the middle of the canteen. Martha's eyes widened. "Bomb!" she shrieked. "Everyone out!" Elizabeth and Martha scrambled to their feet and sprinted side-by-side for the door. Time seemed to slow as the bomb exploded, just out of range of them. The concentration camp was in chaos as Hitler Youth soldiers ran around, shouting in German. There were Allies spilling out of the planes, and gunshots were being fired everywhere. An Ally soldier grabbed Martha and Elizabeth's arms and ran towards one of the Allies' planes. Suddenly, Martha fell limp in the soldier's arms. Surprised by the sudden dead weight, the soldier let go of her and she collapsed onto the ground. Blood pooled from a small bullet wound near her diaphragm. As Elizabeth crouched next to Martha, Martha slipped something small and metal into Elizabeth's palm. "Be safe. Be brave. I'll see you again. I promise," Martha whispered. Then her eyes glazed over and she never spoke again. "No. No," Elizabeth cried, tears running down her cheeks. She felt the Ally tug on her elbow, but she ignored it. Then, without warning, the soldier lifted her up and ran inside the Allies plane just as the doors were about to close. Elizabeth screamed and cried and pounded on the soldier's chest, but he was strong and didn't let go.

When the plane finally landed at a military outpost, Elizabeth let herself be set onto a stretcher and carried to a white room. Then, she saw something being placed over her nose and mouth. She inhaled a breath to scream for help, but she suddenly felt exhausted. She let out a muffled shout, and against her will, fell asleep. When she woke up, she found herself being examined for injuries and diseases, but after the examination, she was told that she was just weak from starvation and overwork. However, Elizabeth hardly seemed to hear. All she could think about was Martha. Elizabeth opened her hand, and saw Martha's final gift to her—a thin metal necklace with a Star of David pendant. She vaguely remembered her parents giving Martha the necklace before Jews started being persecuted. How did Martha keep it hidden all this time? she wondered. Slowly, Elizabeth sat up and clasped her sister's final gift around her neck.

Seventy years later, Elizabeth still wore the necklace. She'd immigrated to America and lived a long, happy life. She let out a peaceful sigh and closed her eyes as she felt death envelope her. When her eyes opened again, Elizabeth saw Martha standing in front of a blinding white globe of light. She took Martha's outstretched hand and stepped towards the light...