

In Loving Memory of my Greatgrandparents

Berthold Heilbronner
geb. 17.Okt.1872
gest. 1942
Theresienstadt

Franziska Heilbronner
geb. 12.Jan.1882
gest. 1944
Auschwitz

BY: ERIC BRONNER

Amidst the black and white faces in the dreary Jewish ghetto a little girl, wearing a pale-red coat, tip-toed away from the crowd. Later, that same pale-red coat lay burning in a pile of flaming bodies. My maternal grandfather could have been the SS guard that watched the flames grow. My father's grandparents could have been in them. Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List brought those flames into my life. And as part of me burned while the other part watched, chills of fear sprinted down my spine, tears of anger wet my eyes. "How could we ever let human beings be treated like animals?" We did and we still do. Schindler's List reminds us that human life is priceless and therefore, should never be subjected to injustice.

A human life's value can never be weighed out in silver or gold and yet we do it all the time. Americans are unwilling to accept the cost of national health care. Therefore, in a sense, we are saying that we value our money more than taking care of uninsured, dying patients. The profit motive is what drives this country and it is what drove Schindler for a major part of the movie. However, near the end, Schindler wept on his knees when he realized that any material object he owned could have saved another Jewish life. Today, that hour a doctor spends volunteering in an inner-city health clinic, that meal a volunteer serves in a soup kitchen, might save another life. If we don't give all we can to those who are suffering, whether it be volunteering time or capital, we will weep as Schindler did. Money didn't make Schindler happy, but it did give him the ability to save over 1000 Jews. Therefore, our material wealth

is not bad if we use it for a higher purpose. But when we place selfish interests above saving human lives, something is amiss. By not sharing our resources with the poor, the unemployed or uninsured we are saying that their lives are not valuable enough to be saved. That ideology was wrong during World War II and it is still wrong today.

If life is invaluable, then it should never be subjected to injustice. Every day we have the opportunity to stop injustice occurring around us. The holocaust didn't happen over night. Little by little anti-Jewish sentiments in Germany grew and the hatred solidified. Today, stopping racial jokes, sexist comments and seemingly harmless thoughts can make a difference.

In the late 1930's the German population didn't have the moral courage to do this. Soon Heil Hitler's unjust racial and anti-semitic views were accepted as law. Ironically, the Jews were extremely productive and the backbone of German business and industry. Nevertheless, Germany needed a scape goat. Someone had to be blamed for the horrendous economic conditions. Over 6 million innocent Jewish women, men, boys and girls were that scapegoat. Their sacrifice was greater than any economic hardship or political loss. Their sacrifice was life.

Today, America is looking for scapegoats. We blame the poor, the mentally ill, immigrants and minorities for our country's problems. Just as it was not the Jews who were to blame in Schindler's time, it isn't these people in our time. On the contrary, it is the Americans who do not have the moral courage to blame themselves, the Americans who are unwilling to

accept responsibility for our nation's problems and share some of their wealth in order to find solutions. Schindler's desire for money was not superseded until he saw just how gross the injustices occurring in his country were. It took the fiery death of an innocent child for Schindler to finally wake up. We see this type of cruelty everyday in America: babies are being left to die, sick people get no care, bystanders are being murdered. The list never ends. When Schindler looked past himself and risked his life and financial ruin in order to save over 1,000 Jews, he did an "absolute good." This "good" resulted in over 6,000 new lives today. When we are willing to look past ourselves, as Schindler did, injustice will be halted and future generations will flourish.

Schindler's List made me aware that I am a product of both anger and viciousness, fear and suffering. In a poem written for her parents who died in concentration camps, my great aunt says,

Man murdering man Has to come to an end!

We all will have to learn how to respect one another,

How to live within our limitations,

If we wish to leave behind this earth,

A fertile ground, The space above, Unmarred,

For Future generations to explore -and- to adore.

The message in this poem is the same as in Schindler's List: human life must be valued and injustice must cease. Echoed in its lines is the ancient Jewish proverb inscribed on the ring that "Schindler's Jews" gave to him. "He who saves one, saves the world." Schindler did it, now it is our turn.

steven spielberg

10 May 1994

E.H. Bronner
21st Company
United States Naval Academy
Annapolis, Maryland 21402-5027

Dear E.H.,

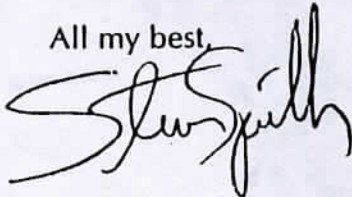
I'm honored to have had the opportunity to read your insights and reflections on my film. You certainly have a unique perspective on this subject matter, coming from both German and Jewish roots.

The awards and accolades received by SCHINDLER'S have been wonderful, but the most rewarding experience I've had is hearing how the film has impacted bright, young people like you, who will carry awareness, tolerance and hope into our future. It warms my heart even more to know that this understanding resides in someone dedicated to serving our country.

Your interpretation of SCHINDLER'S LIST is close to my own. Although there is great sadness and horror in the film, SCHINDLER'S is indeed a film about *hope*. You saw a central theme as, "Human life must be valued, and injustice must cease." I think what I was trying to say goes a bit further - we must all value human life, and we must help stop intolerance, ignorance, hate, and humanitarian injustice. It's about *action*, along with compassion. It's a cry of reminder: any of us, at any time could be an "Oskar Schindler".

Thank you so much for your thoughts and personal history, and for recognizing the important themes I sought to share in SCHINDLER'S LIST.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Spielberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steven" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Spielberg".



May 1994 Steven Spielberg, Eric and Dr. Bronner's Soap. U.S. Navy Academy

