

**“Children and the Holocaust” Essay**  
**by**  
**Rachael Cupp**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Grade**  
**Edison Junior High School, Rock Island, IL**

Words cannot express the horror of the holocaust. Attempting to express the pain and suffering of so many men, women, and children is nearly impossible. But, I understand one way to keep their story alive is to tell it. I will do so by telling you about Sylvia Perlmutter, a girl who lived in the Lodz Ghetto.

The Lodz Ghetto was located in Poland and was established after the Nazis invaded Poland. Even though before the War the Jewish population had been living throughout the city, they would now be forced to live together in a small area. The Lodz Ghetto had a population of 164,000 at the beginning of the War and only 900 at the end. Because the Jewish people were not allowed to buy or sell outside of the ghetto, food and supplies were difficult to obtain, which eventually caused death by starvation for about 45,000 people. Others died from disease because there were so many in such a small space.

Sylvia Perlmutter would have been four years old when World War II began. She was 10 when it ended. Sylvia would have nightmares for the rest of her life about how the world was when she was a child. Treacherous and dangerous. This little girl didn't get to have play dates, her own bedroom, or even go to school.

A normal day would have been the following:  
Wake up to find nobody home. Eat leftovers from the evening before. Play with her rag dolls. Make up a game. Move to another part of the house to play a game. Family comes home. Eat dinner in silence. Play with dolls. Go to bed.

And, repeat. If the family would have tried to leave the ghetto for any reason, they would have been shot on sight.

Sylvia would have been the age of my brother when she had this daily schedule. I cannot imagine any child I know of today that would be able to grow up so fast at that young age. Sylvia and her family had the option to go to a “safer” place multiple times.

Luckily Sylvia had a father who had the feeling they were in the safest spot they could be for the time being.

Throughout the six years of the ongoing nightmare of the holocaust, Sylvia spent nights hiding with her father in the cemetery to avoid deportation. The Nazis were deporting all of the children at that time. Sylvia lost many friends who simply disappeared, never to be seen again.

Nights that she wasn't hiding, she had to do her very best to make no noise for fear of the Nazis finding her. But day after day, Sylvia, her sister, and her parents had the strength to give thanks that they were alive and together yet another day. It's quite amazing to look at how strong families had to be during this horrifying event in our history.

Reading about Sylvia and studying the holocaust has helped me realize how fortunate I am. I am making an effort not to complain about being asked to do chores or do my part in the family. I have come to realize that my fellow neighbors and I do not appreciate how fortunate we are. I realize that freedom is valuable and a privilege, and should not be taken for granted.

If you really sit back and think about getting on a train thinking you were going to a safer place, but in reality you would be heading to your death, you can grasp the effect of what the Jewish families had to go through. The truth of what happened to the Jewish people is truly disgusting and upsetting. I am beyond blessed to be free of worry about my religious beliefs or what my genealogy might be. Instead, I can go to school, make friends, and not wonder where they have gone and why they won't be coming back. Sylvia is truly one of my inspirations by the way she stuck through everything a young child had to go through. I truly appreciate where I am today and that I have had the opportunity to have learned about a very important historical event.

Every time I hear "the holocaust" I think of Sylvia and what her family, along with thousands of other families, had to go through. While others may take our lives here for granted, I am proud to say that after reading about Sylvia, I do not. I learned many other things as I read about the holocaust—not just that families had to live through a torturing time. I learned that the people were rich in family and love, as it should be today. I learned that in difficult times, our family, friends and simple things are all we

need. I hope that after you have read my essay, you will understand that you are a very privileged person to be able to believe in whatever religion you want, and live where you want without fear of punishment.

And what happened to Sylvia? She and her sister were two of only twelve children who survived from Lodz Ghetto. she was rescued in 1945, the day before her birthday. Sylvia moved to Paris, France, with her parents and later lived in Maryland, USA. She married, had children and grandchildren. In later years, she volunteered at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. She was a survivor.