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Being Good

"Anne Kustel, wo bist du?" a handwritten sign asks, "Deine kinder Emma und Hans suchen Sie!". My jaw falls open; I can hardly believe what I am seeing.

I am standing in front of a massive wooden bulletin board plastered with the pleas of individuals looking for their loved ones, in a hall where the silence weighs upon your chest like the weight of a thousand bricks. To my left are rows upon rows of shelves of the names of those who perished due to their Jewish Heritage.

I am in a museum called Haus der Geschichte in Bonn Germany, and am seeing the effects of the Holocaust firsthand. As I move through the halls and look at the black and white photos of young victims of the Holocaust, I become more and more heartbroken and overwhelmed. How is it that we humans are capable of murdering each other? How is it that families can be torn apart, that lives are lost, and that entire populations are wiped out for simply being a different religion or race? How is it that genocides like the Holocaust can be repeated again and again?

We say "never again", but do we ever hear it? We vow to never let ourselves repeat the mistakes of the past, yet we find ourselves in the same position again and again.

Last year a guest came in to my world issues class to speak about genocide. He was part of the UN Peacekeeping task force sent to Rwanda in 1994. When asked what we as individuals can do to prevent these massacres from reoccurring he stated that we simply must "be good." That's it. Just be good. Be a good person, a good human being, a good neighbor, a good friend. A good person.

His words have stuck with me ever since. That's what I'm trying to be now. It is through travel that I have seen how incredibly alike we all are, regardless of the colour of our skin, the language we speak, or the religion we follow. I may not be able to speak your language and we may not have the same skin colour, but we both understand the same feelings of pain and hope. I want to use the world as my classroom to travel and write about the issues I am exposed to and wouldn't have understood without my presence in that place. I want to use my abilities as a writer so that we can all understand there is something shared between us that makes us human; the ability to feel and to translate those feelings into "good" actions. This ability to feel is what makes us human, and it is what we must use to prevent tragedies like the Holocaust from ever reoccurring. It is immersive travel that has helped me to understand that. It is this lesson, this understanding of the "humanness" of us all that I wish to share through my travels and the writing that comes from it.