

“Vorsprung Durch Technik”

I wrote this poem following my recent visit to the Cape Town Holocaust Centre. I was deeply moved and felt an overwhelming sense of trans-generational guilt. I was saddened and horrified by the Jewish genocide. Half-German, I wanted to express my shame and hopefully that of other Germans. This piece illustrates that although we must never forget, in order that history never repeats itself, we must focus our energy on being the most accepting and respectful examples of human beings. To create a humane and considerate co-existence, each of us must be mindful of our attitude, words and deeds.

By Savannah Althoff-Thomson

"Vorsprung Durch Technik"

("Advancement Through Technology")

If I could change a single moment in history,
It would be the moment Adolf Hitler was conceived.

The museum walls shout images that imprint,
The brutal concentration camps
The hundreds of panic stricken faces
Thousands of corpses
Millions of terrified Jews.

Amongst the sea of horror
Are the German military
Smiling soldiers
Cackling at the victims
Stripping them of dignity
“Schadenfreude”.

Raised in a country
Popularized by the descendants of those soldiers
And then I realise
I too am a descendant.
Instantly I feel contaminated.

I contemplate;
The blood pumping through my veins is guilty with the merciless deaths of millions.
I am alive because my great grandparents were not Jews.
For, if they were,
My family's genealogy would be no more
A gas chamber the grave yard.

The guilt of what my kind has done
Weighs me down
Tears at my heart
Swims in my tear ducts
And my head hangs

Because in these moments
I am not proud to be German.
I am not proud of my language.
I am not proud of where I came from.

I want to say sorry to every photograph
I want to write countless eulogies
I want to treat these Jews with respect they were due

But then I think to myself,
6 million Jews did not die for me to be sitting on a museum floor crying.

So I pick myself up
Swallow my tears
I vow to be better.

To treat each human with respect
To embrace all cultures
To be mindful of oppression
And to encourage others to fight beside me for our human right
To encourage each other as decent human beings.

Although we can't change the past,
I'm set on changing the present.

By Savannah Althoff-Thomson