

## **Invisible heroes**

They passed a law that said a man is no longer a human being. Man - Jew. Man - German, Slovak. Is there any difference? Yes, they said. A German is a man. A Slovak is a man. But the Jew is nobody... And the Jew harms others.

And no one revolted. No one screamed. Indeed, no one was allowed to scream - only human conscience could have stood up against the inhumane laws. Yellow stars twinkled in the streets, silently calling for help. Was there anyone to hear their mute plea? Was anybody listening to their own conscience?

Yellow stars moved along the streets and slowly disappeared. The trains left and the flickering lights in the streets were slowly turned off.

The people of Bardejov overlooked the scenes with quiet faces. Everyone read the same law. Everyone saw the same things. Everyone faced the same question: Stand up against what you read? Act against what you saw? It was the same question for everyone, but each one had to answer it individually.

The streets of Bardejov remained peaceful, as if no one knew that the toughest battles took place there. Silent battles in which you do not hear shots, battles in which there were no soldiers, only civilians. Battles with no blood shed, yet battles for lives. The lives of those wearing a yellow star, afraid to walk the streets of Bardejov, and the lives of those who, despite their fear, decided to shelter the threatened ones in their homes.

Everyone had fears and uncertainty. But those who were able to overcome the injustice in their hearts were also able to act against it. They did not fail in their convictions, their conscience and their humanity. Only those who opened the door to their hearts could have opened the door of their houses. Only individuals who could perceive the pain of those wearing yellow stars were able to take the risk of saving them. These brave ones not only endured living with those they chose to hide; they also endangered their own families, and sometimes even died alongside those who they tried to save.

Silently, the doors of a few Bardejov homes opened and yellow stars came in. In these houses the stars became people again, real human beings. There were no inhumane laws. Inside these houses love won over evil - the love that the Almighty put into their hearts, the love that preserved humanity.

No one knew about it. No one could know about those who overcame their fear in order to help; those who were not commanded by hatred or defeated by injustice. No one knew about neighbors who were heroes - invisible heroes who won the most difficult battle.

Many trains left Bardejov and many yellow stars were blinking inside the dark wagons. Only a few of them were able to stay in their homes. The trains arrived and departed, taking happiness and memories and bringing oblivion. Many rescuers and those who were rescued were forgotten, those modest ones who did not seek glory. Yet heroes, even invisible ones, cannot be left unnoticed. Those who have fought against injustice deserve the name of Righteous Among the Nations. They were Righteous among the indifferent. Righteous among those overwhelmed with fear and hatred. We are grateful for their stories which shine brighter than the yellow stars. They show us the right way and warn us of injustice.

Nowadays, the law ensures that these horrible events will not recur. Today the law says that any man is a human being. Man - Slovak, Jew, German, Roma ... But then again, even today, there are still some people who say that the current law is wrong. They try to tell us again that a man is not human. Man - Jew, Roma or Man - German, Slovak - they say that there is a difference.

We face similar questions today: Should we stand against what we read so often? Should we act against what we see? While we all face the same question, each one of us needs to answer it on our own. Many people have already fought and won this fight. They condemned the past injustices and disagree with the present ones. Many have become today's invisible heroes. And yet, is it enough to be just an invisible hero?

Today, we do not need to hide anyone and we do not have to hide ourselves. We can fight injustices in the open: if we disagree with what we read, we should write; if we disagree with what we hear, we should talk; and if we disagree with what we see, we should act.

**Dorota Porubská, 17 years old**  
**Gymnázium L. Stöckela, Bardejov**