

1st Place: Jaycelan Stewart

Bader Hillel Academy (Whitefish Bay, WI)

New Beginnings Then, New Beginnings Now: "A Letter to Hans Dovid Ettlinger

Dear Hans Dovid Ettlinger,

My name is Jaycelan Stewart, but my Hebrew name is Yemina Basha. I am a thirteen year old African American Jew, who moved to Wisconsin, when I was three. I recently read about your story, and how you came to America, from Germany at just one and a half years old. I have a sister around that age; I see how she looks at the big things and small things, in this world. It makes me wonder, what will become of her, in the future.

Shoes, during the Holocaust, spread a very horrifying message to everyone, but when people saw your shoes, and the story behind it, there was a sigh of relief. Your shoe, wasn't one that had been taken away from you before the gas chamber. It was part of the pair of shoes, that protected your feet, as you came to a new beginning – America. I come from a family that is deeply rooted in culture and history. On my father's side, I am a great-granddaughter of an African slave. My great-grandfather worked hard for success, and never gave up. Every day when I wake up, I see more and more of him, through my father.

On my Jewish side – my mother's, my ancestors came to America from Russia, and started families here. Being in my family, I personally understand why you kept your shoes. My grandfather, Lawrence Russell, was born on July 30, 1937. Sadly, he became a widower as of December 2015, and has been going through some items in his house and has been disposing of items. But for all those years, for over seventy years, he has kept a pair of little brown shoes, from when he was just a toddler.

I go into museums, exhibits, and galleries. I see things, from all around the world, and throughout history, but I stand there in bewilderment, scratching my head, trying to figure out, **"Why would someone donate something so priceless, something that is so connected to their lives, that they could never make a copy of."** But then, I learned about you, and I found my answer. It's not that people like you don't value it anymore, but that it is deserving of being shared with everyone. As times goes on, each new generation becomes less connected to God, and their history. Hans, you hand made that string between me and God stronger. You don't think about how the Nazis destroyed your home, and how you had to leave things behind. Instead you talked about how you came to America, and had a new life, a new beginning. Most of the time when something bad happens we focus on how devastating it is, but instead we must learn to rebuild and start a new beginning.

My school, Bader Hillel Academy, recently received over three bomb threats within the last three months. The Talmud states, **"Live well. It is the greatest revenge."** The people making these bomb threats want to see us scared and worried, but we aren't, because we know that God is with us. We continue to grow, learn and pray. We have become successful in everything we do. Throughout our lives, we have started over. From Avraham leaving Canaan, to walking through the sea, from standing in concentration camps, to going to Jewish schools. We are all growing and changing, thanks to people like you. And may it happen speedily in our days, we will all have a new beginning with you, in Israel with Moshiach.

Sincerely,

Jaycelan Stewart – Future Teacher of Bader Hillel Academy

ימינה באשה – המורה העתידי של האקדמיה הלל בדר

