

Hope Makes You Free: Dita Kraus's Story

Literature is important to so many people throughout history because it can take the reader to the past, present, or future but, most importantly, literature can give someone hope. During the Holocaust, an uncertain future clouded many people's ability to hope and dream. Anne Frank even said, "Where there's hope, there's life. It fills us with fresh courage and makes us strong again." Her diary was vital in keeping her alive because writing filled her with a sense of optimism and the hope that one day life could return to what it had been before the Nazi invasion. Anne's story shows that someone can take everything you own but they will never be able take a person's intellectual ability and their ability to dream. How is all this pertinent to the subject at hand?

Personally, I have a deep interest in literature so I find the story of Dita Kraus, the librarian of Auschwitz, very intriguing. In July 1929, Dita was born in Prague to a family of Jewish people who weren't all that devoted to religion. They didn't even identify themselves as Jews until the Nazis recorded the census that required everyone to state their religion. Little did they know what a profound impact that decision would have on their lives. As time went on, things got worse for Jews and other groups that the Germans targeted as being impure. First, the boycott of Jewish businesses started and all Jews were banned from governmental job positions. The dismissal of Jewish children like Dita from school, parks, movie theaters, and most public places followed. Then, all books were banned from being read by the Jews and all written works whose writers were deemed not German enough like Jewish author, Sigmund Freud, were burned. Despite all this, Dita was, for all intents and purposes, just like any other child in any other time but she had a persistent drive to keep hope alive in the midst of all the confusion and violence of WWII.

By the time Dita was ten years old, Czechslovakia had been invaded and occupied by the Nazis. At age 13, her family was thrown into Theresienstadt ghetto. In December 1943, Dita relocated to Birkenau in Poland which is commonly referred to as Auschwitz II. It's hard to imagine the feelings of Jews seeing the concentration camp gate with the sign saying "Arbeit Macht Frei" or "Work makes you free". This phrase seems so foreboding and would likely cause pessimism to set into a person's mind. This was not the case for Dita.

While she must have believed that saying she did not believe in the actual intention that had been put forth by the Nazis. Dita developed her own interpretation of how work would set her free. At some point, Kraus met a Kinderblock teacher named Freddy Hirsch and they became partners in developing a secret undercover plan. All the people called to the concentration camps were allowed to bring a suitcase with some of their belongings and memories inside. Little did the Jews know that all their possessions would be taken away from them upon arrival at the camp. This is where the secret undercover operation would come in. A group of camp inmates were tasked to sort the suitcases and some of the inmates began smuggling books for the school children and other adults to read. A variety of books were kept hidden in a secret place in the wall of the 'daycare' Freddy and Dita helped to run.

All the books had to be tracked and only placed in the hands of people who could be trusted to keep their operation a secret from the Nazis. After a while, these books became so worn out from repeated use that they had to be mended with the limited materials available to them. The stories in these smuggled books helped readers preserve the little bit of normalcy that the Jews had left after being taken from their homes into this unfamiliar, cruel place. Reading and having an adventure from the world outside their prison brought hope of a new day and hope of a future that could, once again, be full of fun and laughter.

Although Dita Kraus had done so much for the morale of the prisoners, she remained a humble person and held onto the goal of doing the right thing for her fellow Jews. Her courage speaks volumes about how much she cared for other people despite the penalties she would have endured if she had ever been caught. Dita's partner in the undercover mission, Freddy Hirsch, and both Dita's parents died in the concentration camps. Despite this, Dita managed to survive and carry hope throughout her time at Auschwitz. After WWII, she was able to move on with her life and make her own family. Eventually, she moved to Israel where she continues to live today at the age of 91 years old.

For many years no one knew Dita Kraus's story. Why after all these years did she decide to tell others about her undercover mission? For Hope. Even now, it is important to inspire the next generation of doers to be brave and selfless because it is the right thing to do. No one needs to forget this event's existence or deny the brutality that occurred. The survivors illustrate the value of hope and the importance of putting one foot in front of the other even when it seems impossible. Most importantly, literature can offer assurance that a topsy turvy world will eventually correct itself with hope, courage, and cooperation.

Work Cited Page

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