

HOW A SURVIVOR FEELS

Now I'll tell you how a survivor feels. A survivor is an actor experienced in her art. She puts on nice clothes, matched up with a smile, and tries to recapture the pleasures of life, and becomes keenly aware of her inability to enjoy.

A survivor will go on vacation and while watching a show, there will appear in her mind the picture of her mother with her grandson in her arms gasping for breath.

A survivor will read in the paper about a fire, and desperately hope that her brother died from the fumes before the flames reached him.

A survivor will think of her sister with her three dead children and inhale the gas to feel the agonies of their death.

A survivor will go to a party and feel lonesome in the crowd.

A survivor will be very quiet yet scream inside.

A survivor will cry, and pretend to her children it's a mere headache.

A survivor will make large weddings, invite a great many people, but the ones she wants most will never arrive.

A survivor will go to a funeral and not cry for the dead who died but for the ones that were never buried.

A survivor will reach out to you and not let you get close, for you remind her too much of the difference between her and you, remind her too much of what she could have been, yet will never be.

A survivor is only at ease with other survivors, though they never talk about their past.

A survivor is broken and beaten in spirit, she lies even to herself and pretends to be like you.

A survivor is a wife, mother, friend, neighbor yet unknown to all, she is known only to herself.

A survivor is a restless tortured person, the only thing she can really enjoy are her children.

Yet a survivor's child is not easy to be, for she expects "from her child the impossible.

The survivor wants her child to be constantly happy, to do all the things she couldn't do, to learn everything she was denied. In her eagerness she places a burden on the child, for the child must develop her own image, experience and learn from her own mistakes, the child must be allowed to experience even pain, so that she can recognize happiness when it comes her way.

A survivor will awake in a sweat from her nightmares. Unable to sleep again, in vain does she chase the ghosts from her bedside, but they remain her guests for the remainder of the night.

A survivor possesses one thing you do not: a fearlessness of death, for she has faced death so many times, and also because she knows that this is when she will finally find peace.

I exposed myself to you, and removed the mask of the survivor, so you can become aware of the full impact of the Holocaust. To understand, that when they killed the six million, you may as well know what happened to the living. This you cannot study in your textbooks, our pain is not on record. It's important for you to know, since you are at the threshold of your life, some of you may become future leaders, it will be up to you to fight oppression and bigotry. To insist on laws where everybody is free to worship, to lead productive lives, to educate their children. If you will remember the Holocaust, you will prevent history from repeating itself. You must never again stand by silently when such injustice breaks out against a people.

For swastikas are still being worn in Skokie and other places, and though you may think these are only a few, madness starts with a few, and many more follow. As long as you will remember the Holocaust, you'll never allow such evil and injustice to contaminate the world.

Cecile Klein
Survivor, Poet