

It's Possible

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I first met George Heller on Saturday, February 2nd at 3 in the afternoon. He was waiting for me at the door with a large smile on his face. He waved good-bye to my mother and invited me in. I didn't know it at the time, but this was to be the beginning of a friendship that would change my life.

The first thing I noticed about George was his smile. He had laugh lines that outlined his temples and his cheeks. He invited me to take a seat, and sat beside me. We talked casually for a while, getting to know each other as friends would. He started telling me his story. How he had wanted to become a typesetter before the war. How he came to the United States with nothing but the two dollars in his pocket and the clothes on his back. How, against all odds, he graduated from MIT in 1959 and started working for IBM on the same year.

One George story stands out to me in particular. He called it the "Top of the Wall" story. It began in April of 1945, when George was in Mauthausen. George and three of his childhood friends were discussing whether or not they would be able to survive the war. One of his friends, Robert, said, "I can't take this anymore. I have given up hope. There is no possible way we can come out of this alive." Just like that, Robert dropped dead. He hadn't been shot or killed. He had died from the lack of a will to live.

To commemorate his friends who died in the war, every year from his 76th to his 86th birthday, George climbed a rock wall at the YMCA. On top of the wall, there is a four-foot-long banner that reads, “It’s Possible.” George put it up there himself.

I knew George for two months and twenty days. On April 22nd, when I came home from school, my parents told me that George passed away earlier that morning. I was devastated. How could this happen? George? Of all people? George, who had been so full of life two months earlier?

That’s when I started thinking about the connection of life and death, and the value of time. It seemed to me that the reason that time is so valuable to us is that we have a limited amount of it. We are given a set time to be on this planet, and once that time is up, your life ends.

We all know that our time will come, but we don’t think about it. It’s not a pleasant thought. Unfortunately, this translates to not realizing when we are wasting our time when we could be doing so much more. It seems to me that if you have a limited number of days, you should wake up in the morning, look at yourself in the mirror, and say, “If today were my last, would I still set out to do what I am going to do today?” And if, for enough days, the answer is no, then a change needs to take place. This is the urgency of now, the urgency of today.

With the urgency of now come many things. An urgency to help our neighbors. An urgency to love, to laugh, to share our lives with those around us. An

urgency to have dinner with our families and talk about our day. An urgency to learn about history.

This is why Holocaust Education is so important. With every passing day, there are less firsthand accounts of the horrors that occurred during the Second World War. There are fewer opportunities to teach and to learn. It is obvious that this is important, for if it weren't, you wouldn't be gathered here today. If there is one thing you should take away from being here today, it would be this: remember the urgency of now. Live each day with love, happiness, and laughter. Remember to smile each and every day. And, as George said, "It's possible."