

2025 Elie Wiesel Competition

1st Place Senior Poetry

Genesis Lopez, 10th Grade

San Jacinto Leadership Academy (CA), T Gorosave

Experience vs. Interpretation

I met a man, his hands were worn,
His eyes were tired, his voice was torn.
He told me things I couldn't bear,
Of screams that lingered in the air.

He spoke of hunger, walls so tall,
Of shadows dancing down the hall.
Of friends who vanished, names erased,
Of nights where silence took their place.

I listened close, I tried to see,
But what he lived was lost to me.
I'd never felt my ribs protrude,
Or begged for scraps of rotten food.

I'd never stood in lines so long,
Or whispered prayers just to hold on.
My world was safe, my hands were clean,
I'd never known what he had seen.

And yet, I promised I would try,
To hold his truth, to not let lie
The pain, the loss, the hollow stare,
To tell his story, to show I care.

But stories twist with passing time,
Words get lost between the lines.
A secondhand account can teach,
But never grasp what fingers reach.

A book may tell of grief and war,
But ink won't smell the bloodstained floor.
A film may show the bodies piled,
But never hear a mother's child.

A witness sees, a witness feels,
Their scars are proof that history's real.
But when they're gone, when voices fade,
What's left of all the price they paid?

It's up to us, to hold it tight,
To tell their truth, to keep their light.

Not let the past be washed away,
But guard it fiercely, day by day.

For history bends, but truth must stay,
Or darkness steals it all away.