

**The Spiritual Triumph of  
Wladyslaw Szpilman:  
Resistance in the Face of  
Tragedy**

Kevin Zhu

Individual Website

Junior Division

1200 Student Composed Words

500 words in Process Paper

Last year, I created a project on the Chinese Exclusion Act and was able to learn about my culture and discriminatory acts throughout the history of the Chinese. I wanted to expand my interest in discrimination in world history. I first heard about Wladyslaw Szpilman while searching for a culturally and musically significant topic. I am a musician and wanted to learn about different influences in diverse cultures to further enhance my knowledge in the cultural life of the world. As I learned more about Wladyslaw, I found his experiences captivating because it showed how music could help throughout one's life, both mentally and physically.

I relied on vast collections of primary sources, mainly from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and the Center for Jewish History. These archives had images, testimonies, and multimedia on the Holocaust. Additionally, Wladyslaw published a memoir of his experiences, titled "*The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939-1945*". This book provided me with the knowledge needed to understand his experiences. I also interviewed Andrzej Szpilman his son and he provided me with further information. Additionally, I interviewed Aviva Blumberg, a Polish Holocaust survivor to further understand this difficult topic. She was able to speak in great detail about Kristallnacht, or the "*The Night of Broken Glass*". After this conversation, I continued to reach out to survivors and experts. I discovered the book "*The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City*" by Barbara Engelking, which provided excellent information and background knowledge regarding everything that occurred in the Warsaw Ghetto.

I selected the website category to maximize the usage of text and visuals as well as creating an interactive environment. I also thought that a website was the most optimal way to present varying forms of analysis and evidence. When building the project, I started by brainstorming ideas of how to present the evidence most efficiently and clearly. I gathered images to support my analysis through visuals and I gathered primary quotes to support my information. Additionally, I had the opportunity to learn programming to make the website more visually appealing. The creation of this project was not only a great learning experience on a lesser-known part on a well-known event but also taught me how to properly research and find supporting evidence and analyze information more efficiently.

Wladyslaw Szpilman's experiences strongly relate to this year's theme, Triumph and Tragedy. His perseverance and will to live after tragically losing his family, prized possessions, and being stripped of his basic rights. These tragedies were not only experienced by Wladyslaw, but by millions of other Jews across Europe. He triumphed by not losing his humanity, continuing to compose music and participating in the resistance. This is truly a triumphant story on a spiritual level over one of the worst atrocities of humankind. It still impacts us today through his memoir, movie and his musical renditions inspire many today to continue to do what they believe in.