

It is in darkness that it is easiest to see the light

Thought for the Day

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Yesterday I sat with 60 primary school children from Glasgow to watch a dramatic production of *Just One More Dance*, the autobiography of Ernest Levy, a survivor of the Nazi death camps who now lives in Glasgow.

What we saw burned deep into the soul of all who watched it. When the audience was ordered out of the conventional theatre into a reconstructed camp barracks whose doors slammed us into total darkness, we could begin to feel the detachment and distress of the real victims. We did not question the order to move – and I'm not sure we would have questioned an order to add our clothes, or our glasses, or our shoes, to the piles that lined our short march.

I could see those primary pupils shocked into silence, knowing that this was not fiction, but the awful truth. But the truth was waiting for us outside too, in the press reports yesterday about a study of racial and ethnic prejudice in Glasgow.

It seems that one in five of us find it acceptable for minorities to be treated worse than ourselves, solely because of their colour, race, religion, or ethnic origin. Even more shamefully, almost half of us would not want refugees as neighbours – but the truth is that but for the grace of God these refugees might be ourselves.

How do so many adults forget what those primary children understood? When do we learn to hate those who are different, and stop seeing our common humanity? It is significant that Nazi propaganda had to present their victims as “sub-human” in order to justify genocide.

Yet sometimes it is in darkness that it's easiest to see the light. Hope resides in the flickering humanity in these children; it must never be extinguished by hate or self-interest. When Ernest Levy was criticised by his companions in the camp for using the little oil he had found in an empty sardine tin, not for food, but to kindle a ritual light, he replied:

‘We have lived for three weeks without food; I have even lived for three days without water; but no-one can live for even three minutes without hope.’