

The Ultimate Form of *Tzedaka* by Aaron Kagon

Seeing that regular people can make differences in inhuman environments is what inspired me about St. Anna Revisited. The little town of St. Anna am Aigen in the 1930's was probably a quaint, quiet town. Unfortunately, when Hitler came to power that all changed. Barbed wire fences went up, soldiers came, and people were forced into deadly labor. Mr. Sandor Vandor unfortunately was caught up in the middle of this confusion. Throughout chaotic events, the people of St. Anna helped Mr. Vandor through the hardships by giving him food and making him feel welcome. They of course changed his life forever. When Mr. Vandor spoke at my school in Malibu, the story he told the middle school audience was breathtaking. He eluded death several times. Simple actions by common people were contributing factors that saved his life. It is inspiring to me that they did this not for fame or fortune, but because it was the right thing to do.

Looking back at St. Anna Revisited, one line grabbed my eyes and forced me to look back over it again and again. "I told her the reason of our visit. She went into the kitchen and a short time later reappeared with two scrambled-egg sandwiches", is a line that shows how generous the people were. Mr. Vandor endured for months on end and he is still here today. You can call Mr. Vandor a hero. The people of St. Anna en Aigen are true heroes as well. Imagine what would have happened to the forced laborers if the village people had not been so generous! This has inspired me to be more generous.

Mr. Vandor was incredibly lucky to have not perished in the horrible events that unfolded. The people of St. Anna am Aigen represent their city. They are saying, "St. Anna en Aigen is a town in which regular people help strangers". In many towns today you won't find that at all. Mr. Vandor is a person I will never forget. When he spoke to my school, his powerful words echoed throughout the auditorium and I really got a sense of what he was talking about and the importance of the experience he was telling us.

To sum everything up, I would love to thank Mr. Vandor for writing a breathtaking story. I am grateful he is still here to talk to youth and educate us about the holocaust. The most important lesson he has told me is regular people can make a difference in everyday life and when tragedy happens.

The people of St. Anna gave the highest form of *tzedaka*, the Hebrew word for "charity", because they gave without wanting to be thanked or recognized for their goodness. In Jewish religion giving anonymously is the ultimate form of charity because you are giving from your heart without wanting to be given an award, or be thought of as a celebrity of sorts. I am inspired to perform *tzedaka* as well and not so that others will be impressed. Community service is required at my school yet I am inspired to do it because it is required of me by me.