

Franz Thaler, Unforgotten – A Memoir of Dachau

Reviews by students of the 7th grade, history class

Crane School, Santa Barbara

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Unforgotten Book Report

Ian Brown

Franz Thaler's *Unforgotten*, a vivid memoir of the concentration camp Dachau, shows how, even through immense pain and suffering, people can overcome great hardships if they have hope. This heartfelt autobiography goes in-depth on the difficulties of Dachau, and how Thaler survived this ordeal. With hope, perseverance, and a dash of luck, Thaler lives through this terrible experience, and is now able to tell us what it was like. Thaler is truly an excellent role model to everyone, and we can all learn something from his book. I have always been interested in the causes of this terrible war, and when Caz handed out this book, I was intrigued.

In order to survive Dachau, Thaler needed hope. From the moment he is sentenced to Dachau, Thaler is determined that he will make it out to see his family and loved ones in the near future. "The word 'homecoming' gave me hope again and I trusted my comrades once again" (Thaler, 134). Throughout his memoir, you can see Thaler overcomes his various difficulties, using his hope to drive him forward. For instance, several times in the book, Thaler wants to give up and die. But after thinking of his home and how much he wants to be there, and how he still had a chance to make it, he gets back on his feet and does the horrible things that were expected of him. Also, Thaler possessed an abundance of religious faith, and these beliefs gave him a large portion of the hope he needed to survive Dachau.

Thaler also possessed an abundance of perseverance, which he needs to get through his experience at Dachau. For instance, when the SS guards are pushing his physical capabilities to the limit, Thaler refuses to give in and keeps working. This unbelievable drive that he possesses is one of the most key aspects of his personality that keeps him going. "How will I survive this night... These thoughts kept running through my head. Then, I forced myself to hang on..." (Thaler 132). Towards the end of his time in the prison camp, you can see as Thaler becomes more and more hopeful because he knows the Germans are about to lose the war, which means liberation. When this happens, Thaler's perseverance bolsters, allowing him to make it through the tail end of his sentence.

Along with hope and perseverance, luck was also present in Thaler's experience in Dachau. For example, just when Thaler had been pushed to the brink of death from difficult physical labor, he becomes ill and is sent to the sick ward, where he is exempted from all work in the camp and gets extra "care." His time there gives him the extra boost of energy he needs to get through this part of his sentence. Another example of Thaler's luck is when his sentence is shortened from ten years to two and a half. "Then he told me that my sentence had been commuted from ten to two and a half years in the concentration camp" (Thaler 92). With luck on his side, Thaler was finally able to be reunited with his family and friends after a long, tough time at Dachau and its surrounding camps.

It is evident that *Unforgotten* takes place during the time of World War II and the Holocaust. These horrible events in our history were both caused by Adolf Hitler, the former dictator of Nazi Germany. Hitler had a warped vision that, by ridding the world of all Jews, he could purify the German "race," who he thought of as the master race. Along with Jews, Hitler also aimed to eliminate gypsies, people with mental and physical disabilities, and Polish people. To do this, he paralyzed the government of Germany so the Nazi party could take over. Then, Hitler set up concentration camps around his rapidly growing empire. These camps were designed to work people to their limits, and the survival rate was low. Concentration camps were all outfitted with various instruments of torture and death, like the gas showers. According to the website Holocaust: A Call to Conscience, five to six million Jews were killed in these camps between 1933 and 1945.

WWII was just a continuation of World War I, which ended without its primary conflict solved. The Treaty of Versailles was supposed to resolve the war, but it actually had hidden deals that decided the distribution of the German territories. One of the causes of WWI was territory control, and as you can see, this was never resolved. During WWII, there were actually two holocausts going on. One is the extremely famous Holocaust, and the other is referred to as the "Hidden Holocaust." The Hidden Holocaust consisted of an overwhelming number of "criminals" such as homosexuals and people like Thaler. These people were denied becoming soldiers and were taken to concentration camps. Even though these people might not be Jews, they were still considered "polluters of the master

race" or enemies of Hitler. In fact, homosexuals were actually worked harder in concentration camps than many of the other prisoners in order to "regain their manliness." Gays were seen as polluters of the "master race" because they could not have children, and therefore could not keep the master race alive.

Unfortunately, even after the liberation of Dachau in 1945, Thaler was still held prisoner, this time by U.S. troops. Because Thaler and many of his inmates' native language was German, the soldiers thought the political prisoners were S.S. guards. Thaler and the other prisoners are then forced to march to a death camp in France with practically no shelter and a minimal amount of food. While Thaler fights for his life, here is what is happening around the world: The USA dropped two nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Truman, Stalin, and Churchill held the Potsdam Conference, which forms the foundation of the reconstruction of Germany. Japan surrendered on August 15th, 1945.

To sum up, Thaler's *Unforgotten* is an incredibly moving memoir of a man's experience at Dachau, full of examples of hope, perseverance, and luck. The book takes you on a journey full of pain, hardships, and suffering. Overall, I would definitely recommend this book to my peers. *Unforgotten* is an exiting and gripping memoir, and it will leave you wanting more at the end of each chapter. Although the book can get gruesome and rather grim, it is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the Holocaust. Thaler is an unbelievable role model, and *Unforgotten* clearly demonstrates this throughout its pages.

Macy Christal

Mr. Caz

History 7

19 May 2015

Bravery & Sacrifice

For this history book report the class read the book *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler. This book is a historical/narrative book. To me the main points or themes of this book are bravery and sacrifice. These are main points because Franz is very brave when it comes to dealing with all the things that go on with his life. Sacrificing his happiness for his family is a big deal. When he needs to turn himself in so his family won't go to jail because HE didn't go to the army, is a big sacrifice point in his life. I think Mr. McCaslin wanted us to read this book because he wanted us to get a good sense of what happened in the two world wars and why. I think it's great that he is having us read this because it shows us what happened to people and how lucky we are to live in a world like we do.

"I desperately tried to find a way out, as I had already heard about too many of the atrocities which the Hitler regime had perpetrated. And so I decided to follow the advice of some of my friends and to flee to the mountains" (Thaler 39). This is an example of bravery in this story. Franz takes a risk and flees to the mountains. He is risking getting caught and being put in prison. This might not be the best sign of bravery from him, but it shows that he has the gut.

"Soon it was made known that the whole families of the draft resisters would be arrested unless the latter turned themselves in" (Thaler 46). This is an example of sacrifice. Instead of letting his family take the fall for him running away, he turned himself in. I don't think Franz Thaler made the right decision by running away, but if I were him I would be scared too. He was brave and scared at the same time. He was brave enough to run away, but scared enough to do so. Sacrifice for himself, his family, and his friends in this book are very important.

"How will I survive this night? Will I survive at all? Perhaps I will be lying in the morning, huddled up somewhere, dead on the ground. These thoughts kept running through my head. Then I forced myself again to hang on" (Thaler 132). Franz is really brave. Holding on would be very hard to do especially when you are in that much pain.

Hunger and thirst taking of your body, nowhere to lie down, not much sleep, and you're almost freezing to death. It's hard to stay strong through all these hard times, and that's bravery and sacrifice.

“According to a wise saying, you have to eat bread mixed with tears once in your life in order to be able to appreciate its true value” (Thaler 137). Franz had clearly gone through so much that tears are running into this bread he is so hungry. He had six days with no food. I could personally not imagine how that would feel. This shows you how much you should really value what you get to eat, drink, and everything else that you get in this world. Bravery, sacrifice, care, passion, encouragement, wisdom, and so many other traits are why he is alive today.

In the 1930's Germany had a very weak government. Having a weak government helped Adolf Hitler come into power with his National Socialist German workers. Hitler became a speaker. He made speeches about how he could make Germany a better place. He promised everyone a better life. He attracted many worldwide. When he was elected as the leader, and all the Germans thought they had found the savior to their nation. Hitler was sent to prison before he came to power, and after he was released gave speeches about how to resist the imperialism of Jews and communists. The Nazis then took over with Hitler in power.

(<http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007671>)

The main cause of World War 2 was imperialism. Imperialism is a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force. Hitler was very forceful. By that I mean he wanted what was “rightfully his” he wanted Germany to be a perfect country. He wanted to gain back land and other things that could put him into more power. He obviously built a very strong army that helped him kill off many people and put people through suffering and death so that Germany could be perfect. He didn't want any country to overpower Germany, and wanted to make a statement against Jews, the disabled, the ill, and many other different groups of people.

Franz Thaler wrote his book *Unforgotten* around the 1960's. He wrote this story to tell us about everything that happened during World War 2. Franz did not get as harsh as an experience then others, but clearly did not have a good time suffering through everything he did.

Being brave and never giving up were a great lesson in this book. In my opinion Caz wanted us to read this book because it teaches you about everything that happened in the World Wars. It makes you truly realize what you have in this world. We are so lucky to live in the world we live in today, and are so lucky that we have people who are still alive today to tell this remarkable story. Soon they will not be here anymore, and that's going to be sad to not have someone that has lived to tell the story. What I took away from this book was very incredible for me. To read and realize everything people have been through to survive has changed my life because I truly take life for granted. I never think that anything like this could happen. I bet Franz did not think so either. I bet he wasn't sitting in bed knowing that some crazy man would take over and millions would die and be tortured. I think whoever has the chance to read this book should. It teaches you so much about the history, sacrifice, and bravery that people really have in this world. I would never tell someone not to learn more about what got us to where we are today. The book *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler is truly unforgotten by me. It makes me sit and think for a minute, wow I really am lucky, grateful, thankful, and more for the beautiful life I am living today.

Paige Levinson

Mr. Caz

History 7.1

19 May 2015

Thaler Forever

For my history book report, I read a biography called *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler. This is about an Italian man who refuses to be drafted into the Nazi army. He hides from the army in the mountains and then gets caught and is put in Dachau, a concentration camp. He is a part of the "hidden" holocaust. He is still alive today and he is and was very brave.

Rather than putting them in gas chambers like the Jews, Thaler (+ others) was put to work and then beaten when he did something wrong: "You shirker, you wanted to dodge work!" And he immediately started to slap me" (Thaler 90). It seems as if the Nazis were mad at him for no reason, but everything had to be in order. They had rules and when the rules weren't followed, there would be consequences.

Unlike what we would think, on Christmas, the prisoners got something special: "To our surprise, at midday on Christmas Day, we received, instead of the usual cabbage soup,

three potatoes in their skins and some gravy" (Thaler 76). Although it was small, it was bigger than what they would normally get. Thaler states that it was a feast to him and the men in his bunk.

The men in Dachau were constantly so thirsty that they drank shower water: "When it finally came, we caught it in our hands and mouths" (Thaler 112). People were drinking mud. The shower was a blessing. The men probably hadn't had any fluid in days.

The time period that this book is set in is during the Holocaust (1933-1945). The Holocaust was a war between Nazi Germans and the Jews. Around 6 million Jews were killed and many severely injured. Most Jews were gassed to death.

Thaler was a part of the hidden holocaust. The hidden holocaust was with other races and people that didn't accept to be a Nazi. They were not gassed to death and were treated a slight bit better than the Jews. They were beaten rather than killed.

There are many reasons why the Holocausts may have been started. Possibly because of Germany losing World War I. It also might be because Germans voted Hitler in power. I am surprised that this happened because he wrote a book

explaining what he was going to do and how he was going to do it.

Thaler was a strong and brave man and that is why he is still here today. He survived many horrid sights and experiences. I would recommend this book to an older audience because it is very good, but also very sad. The topics it discusses are very advanced and if you get emotional or have any connection to either of the Holocausts, I wouldn't read until, maybe, age 14 or 15. Overall, *Unforgotten* was a really good book. I would read it again.

Lily Pieramici

Thaler's Troubles

For the book report I read Unforgotten written by Franz Thaler. This was a nonfictional novel written about Thaler's struggles through World War Two. Unforgotten mentions the concentration camps like Dachau, escaping the army, living without enough food and many more ordeals. There are many memoirs written about the challenges through World War II, but this one is especially interesting because it gives you a look into a man who not only was captured into the holocaust, but was forced into another camp, an American one, but Thaler never gives up, using help from his friends. Unforgotten tells of how Thaler strives to survive through many hardships.

One of the main struggles that Thaler has to face is the lack of food in the concentration camps. As we all know you need food to keep yourself strong and energized. If you have ever skipped a meal you feel like you just need to rest, but in Thaler's case there was no rest, it was hard-core labor all day and a few hours to sleep a night. Thaler went up to 6 days without any food. In fact food was such a challenge for Thaler, he wrote two chapters devoted to his food struggles and him receiving food. "There was great jubilation...as the Americans unloaded from big lorries a lot of cardboard boxes with tinned food... One tin contained green beans in oil, the other three biscuits... Before I started eating I broke out in tears"(Thaler 136-137). Thaler was so overjoyed at the amount of food he was given, which for us might just cover lunch, that he started crying. As Thaler later mentions "you have to eat bread mixed with tears once in your life in order to appreciate it's true value"(Thaler 137). I agree with Thaler because I never have truly appreciated food, it's just something that I get served on a silver platter, figuratively and literally. I never have to go to the trouble of planting seeds into the ground to make tomatoes than making into ketchup; all the hard work is already done for me. Overall food is something we rarely worry about and we are so lucky not to, but some people don't have our luck, like kids in Africa. We need to learn to appreciate what we have before we move on. Every bite counts.

Another problem that Thaler faced was imprisonment. There was no way that Thaler could escape the concentration camps, even if he tried he would most likely be caught and killed. Before Thaler is in Dachau he did consider running away. If only he

knew how harsh Dachau was he would have definitely run away. The secret of the real concentration camps seemed to be hidden behind the wire just like the prisoners. Thaler describes a man that he meets early on in his journey who is naked and cramped in a little, dark, cold cage. When the bomb alarms go off everyone flees, but this man can't because he is imprisoned and can't get out of his cage. Thaler never had much room either. Thaler writes about long train rides crouched in a corner, trying to avoid getting trampled, or people urinating and defecating. The biggest imprisonment though, was the figurative cage around him, holding him back from doing what he wants, from being his own person. Thaler wasn't allowed to practice his religion because it wasn't the "right" way. In conclusion it is un-humane to put someone in a real cage, or behind barbed wires etc., and cruel to hold someone back from being him or herself.

Something that helped Thaler live was his friends. A well-known Beatles song sings, "oh I get by with a little help from my friends." In Thaler's case he survives with a little help from his friends. Thaler's friends are the ones who forced him to keep moving, and helped him walk when he was about to fall. When Thaler and the rest of his prisoners and guards were walking to the camp in France, Thaler thought that his life was over, but with the encouragement of his dear friends, he built up enough courage and strength to move on. Though he stumbled sometimes and fell, his friends were always right beside him helping him up. Even if you aren't in as much trouble as Thaler was, your friends will help you through drama at school, or a loved one dying. I wouldn't be the same without my friends, they bring out a lot of my personality, not always positive, but without them I wouldn't be as interesting. Another help this Thaler had was his firm belief in fate. This gave him hope in courage. Overall I think friends are one of the most important things to have because they always have your back, and will aid you through your life.

Unforgotten explains a lot about what happened during World War II and the Holocaust, but it never states the causes. This is why I will be writing about the main causes of World War II and the Holocaust. Most people think, "Oh the main cause of the Holocaust was Hitler." That is false though, because it wasn't only Hitler that made the Holocaust. It was all of the Nazi's and everyone who voted for him. Some of the causes of World War II included other countries wanting revenge on the Germans for starting

World War 1. This was the Treaty of Versailles, some aspects this treaty were that the Germans had to have a small army, that they must accept the blame for starting World War 1, the Germans had to pay major fines for the damage of the war, and that land was taken away from them. No Germans liked this treaty. They were relatively poor at the time and couldn't pay the fines. Germany wanted a ruler who would get rid of the treaty. His name was Adolf Hitler, just the man they were looking for, so they thought. The Treaty of Versailles turned out to be part of the cause of World War II because people weren't happy with this treaty. Another cause was due to the Depression after World War 1. This gave Hitler another chance to rise to dictatorship because he thought the German people should be re-united, so he started invading other countries. The invading of other countries lead to some countries fighting back against the Germans. The way that the Americans got into the war was because the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, who were allies of the Germans. Pearl Harbor was our naval base so we immediately took action to join the war. These are just some of the causes of the World War II.

(<http://www.historyonthenet.com/ww2/causes.htm>) ←I used this website to help me further understand the causes of World War Two.

Thaler was a strong man who was courageous and a hero. When Thaler was faced with hunger, imprisonment and abuse he didn't back down he kept walking, and with some encouragement from his friends he survived. I would recommend this book to friend because I think it is an interesting story filled with drama, hope, and courage. This story makes you feel for Thaler, it transforms you into another time period, and it makes you feel like you are right by Thaler's side. This is a captivating and inspiration novel. I am pleased that Thaler, and all of the other Holocaust survivors brought their emotions and events paper to life on paper, because without it is less people would be educated about the holocaust, and these stories deserved to be heard.

Melina Powell
Dr. Dan McCaslin
History 7
2 June 2015

Unforgotten

A Report on the Memoir of Dachau by Franz Thaler

For my third book report, I read *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler. Franz Thaler was living quite normally in South Tyrol, a self-governing province in northern Italy, when he was ordered to report to the Nazis to be drafted. He didn't want to, like any other normal person would, so he ran away and hid in the Alps. He lived there for quite some time before he was asked by his father to turn himself in: "With tears in his eyes he asked me to turn myself in" (Thaler 46). Otherwise, the Nazis could and would do terrible things to his family.

Unforgotten then describes Thaler's time in Hitler's first *Konzentrationslager* (concentration camp) near the southwestern German town of Dachau; the camp was also called Dachau. Thaler wasn't aware at first of the horrors waiting at the camp: "It became more and more clear to me that I could expect nothing good in Dachau" (Thaler 65). When he first arrived at the camp, he was put in a room and made to wait. Then he was marched to a separate area of camp that looked far more foreboding than what Thaler had seen beforehand: "We walked along the camp wall, which was very high and had an electrified barbed-wire fence. . . I took a close look at my escort again. It was a sad, silent farewell" (Thaler 67).

Thaler was then put in a room filled with bunk beds and other political prisoners, men who hadn't reported when called to join the Nazis. They were made to work; cleaning the halls and the like. One would think that it was much more preferable than what awaited the Jews, but that is another discussion. Thaler quickly learned the routine at Dachau: "I was also looking forward to the meal. I stood at the door and waited for the fall to open. I stood there for a while until it finally became clear to me that here the principle applied: 'He who does not work does not eat.' In our row of cells no food was distributed" (Thaler 72).

Later, after Christmas, Thaler was taken (along with others) to a satellite camp called Hersbruck, near the town of the same name. He was put onto a train with the other prisoners: “Outside the train was ready and waiting nearby. We were loaded on to the cattle trucks, about thirty men per truck” (Thaler 78). The traveling conditions were horribly inhumane. The prisoners weren’t even allowed to use the toilet, and they received no food for two days. The first time Thaler saw food he could think of nothing else: “I grabbed my bread straight away. After two days and one night this was the first food” (Thaler 81). Luckily the first day at Hersbruck they weren’t made to work. But the days following were pretty harsh. They were made to line up in row of three for roll call, and if the lines weren’t straight enough the prisoners were forced to muck about in the snow: “But when the guards were in a very bad mood and the roll-call was not a brilliant success, the whole group was harassed even more: standing to attention the biting cold for hours at a time or crawling around in the snow, then standing up, lying down again, etc. This procedure sometimes lasted rather a long time” (Thaler 83). Other days they were made to construct walls, hew stones, and build barracks.

Work lasted until noon for midday meal and then more work until five in the evening for a meager meal of bread. This labor decreased the health of Thaler and his comrades alarmingly: “I knew from Schlanders that I was 1,72 m tall [5 feet, 6 inches]. Now I was 1,70 m [5 feet, 5 inches]. So you also lost height. When I heard that I weighed forty-five kilos [99.208 lbs], I thought at first that I heard incorrectly. But the man repeated what he had said. The comrade behind me, an Italian, weighed even less, forty-four kilos [97 lbs]” (Thaler 88).

One day, Thaler was called in by the SS (“The *Schutzstaffel*, German for ‘Protective Echelon,’ initially served as Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler’s [1889-1945] personal bodyguards; and later became one of the most powerful and feared organizations in all of Nazi Germany. Heinrich Himmler [1900-45], a fervent anti-Semite like Hitler, became head of the *Schutzstaffel*, or SS, in 1929 and expanded the group’s role and size. Recruits, who had to prove none of their ancestors were Jewish, received military training and were also taught they were the elite not only of the Nazi Party but of all humankind” (“The SS”, history.com). He was told that his sentence had been shortened, from ten years to two and a half years. This was almost unbelievable news for Thaler: “Tears ran down my face, not so much because of the commutation, but because of the humanity which this man let me feel. I could have embraced him for joy” (Thaler 93). A few days later, the prisoners left Hersbruck and returned to Dachau. They continued to labor under

the ever-present scrutiny of the SS men. However, the SS began to stop watching the prisoners with the same intensity. The prisoners could feel freedom coming as the end of WWII neared. And it finally did: when the American soldiers came.

Unluckily, the Americas didn't understand German, so when they heard the prisoners speaking German, they assumed these political prisoners were SS men. It didn't help that Thaler and some of his friends had put on SS shirts (but only because they were freezing and barely clothed). Thaler was made to march all the way to France by the American soldiers for six days, yet he didn't receive any food or water during that entire time. Luckily they did get food in the end. Thaler cried, he was so happy: "Tears kept on running down my face and I swallowed many a tear. According to a wise saying, you have to eat bread mixed with tears once in your life in order to appreciate its true value. I would have certainly not wish this on anybody, but some actually could have a bit more respect for bread... I felt new hope. At this moment I forgot all the sad things that had happened before and thanked God that he had let me survive these hard days" (Thaler 137).

The prisoners were moved from camp to camp. Fortunately, these camps had *much* better treatment of the prisoners. Soon, they were allowed to go home. Thaler took a train part of the way back to South Tyrol, but he had to walk for a few days to arrive back in his hometown. He arrived at his home Sunday, August 19, 1945. He encountered some people who had a hand in his imprisonment at Dachau. He said this about meeting the first person who had done this: "This may have been for me the first rehearsal in forgiving, which I had repeatedly promised to do in the times of my greatest misery" (Thaler 161).

So what caused all of this? Why were the concentration camps made in the first place? It all leads back to the causes of World War I. There are five main causes of WWI: one, the mutual defense alliances made by most of the large empires of the world at the time. Those include Russia and Serbia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, France and Russia, Britain and France and Belgium, and Japan and Britain. Countries attacked each other for various reasons, and other countries who had made alliances with them had to come in and help. These alliances made wars a very messy business. Second reason: imperialism. Imperialism, as defined by the New Oxford American Dictionary, is: "a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force." Many countries in the world had extensive empires at this time, and little fights over the raw materials in their territories led up to World War I. Third reason:

militarism. Many countries were building up their armies, and other countries saw this as a threat. Fourth reason: nationalism. Nationalism is patriotic feeling, principles, or efforts. Nationalism can sometimes be more extreme, which is especially marked by a feeling of superiority over other countries. Some countries were feeling very patriotic, and other nations felt inferior to the power and might that these countries displayed. Nationalism helped fuel not only WWI, but World War II as well. The fifth cause, somewhat indirect, was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary. His assassination caused Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia, and this started the war rolling. WWII, which is mainly when the Holocaust happened, was really an extension of the first world war. The problems that had caused WWI weren't really solved so they caused another war. Innocents like Franz Thaler were affected by these problems, even though they might not have known it.

I enjoyed reading this book because it educated me about something I wasn't very knowledgable about at all. *Unforgotten* wasn't written with a ton of bravado and action, but rather simply and bitter-less. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the concentration camps or the Jewish Holocaust.

C-Mo Ridge
Dr. Caz
History 7
18 May 2015

History Report – Thaler and Dachau

For my book report I read the book Unforgotten by Franz Thaler. This book is based in the time of World War 2. It's about an Italian man who is drafted by the Nazis and runs away to the mountains. Later his family is threatened under death. He turns himself in and is sent to Dachau, an infamous concentration camp.

My book report is, no matter how many times one gets negative impacts, there will always be positive. People can be very cruel, but it is hard to survive it. It is a very fascinating book and it shows how scary the world can be and also how strong the human spirit can be.

Thaler went through very difficult times, hunger, fear, pain and most of all, mental pain. An example of this is when he suffered from frostbite and extreme back pain. If he were sick, he would be thrown out. He would see some of his closest friends die right in front of him. He was always hungry because there was very little food and everything was jam-packed with salt so he was also very thirsty.

Franz Thaler, as we can see, is a very brave man. He suffered though countless ways of torture (pain, hunger, and etc...). Against the odds, he made it with no physical scars, but with mental wounds still un-bandaged.

Before World War II, Germany was in its depression from World War I. The people of Germany are feeling deperate and need something to guide them. Adolf Hitler offers them revenge on those who destroyed their economy in World War I. He also blamed anyone who wasn't Aryan. Hitler comes up with "The Final Solution," which is killing all the Jews and other unwanted groups. Franz Thaler was Italian, a victim of the Final Solution because he was in Dachau. This story is Franz Thaler's reflection of one of the worst times of his life, being taken to Dachau.

The world really can be cruel as we can see. There will always be bad. It can be in different forms. It can look good at first but turn for the worst. For example, a

young Austrian man who promised the solution to Germany's depression but instead created chaos. Although there is a lot of suffering in this book I would recommend it to those people who know the world is cruel but know that there's light at the end of the tunnel.

Ainsley McGovern

Mr. McCaslin

History 7

May 19 2015

Unforgotten Book Report

Like many others for this book report, I read the magnificent memoir of Franz Thaler's experience in a German concentration camp entitled *Unforgotten*. This nonfiction memoir was ultimately heartbreaking and gut wrenching; Thaler recalls his life in Dachau and his struggle for survival. As I mentioned before, this book is a memoir and is written by Franz Thaler, a Holocaust survivor. In this book Thaler speaks and shares about his tough times in the concentration camp, his inspiration to keep surviving, and his realization of how precious life really is.

A huge part of this book is telling Thaler's fight for survival in the German camp. He is sent there at an early age of eighteen. When Franz Thaler is sent to Dachau he does not know where he is going. He knows he is in trouble but he is unaware of what bad fate he has coming for him: "He spoke to me in such insistent and unctuous way that I almost looked forward to the following day" (Thaler 57). In this segment from the book, he has no idea what was going to happen the next day. In this, he is talking to a guard and the next day we would be traveling to Dachau.

When he got to Dachau, it was a completely different life for him, he barely got any food and was treated as if he was an animal that has just come into a pound. That is how I see this, the SS men acted as if the Jews and prisoners were dogs. They were starved and worked to the bone. Most punishments were deathly, but surprisingly when Thaler had scabies and got frostbite on his toes from not having shoes, there were doctors he was taken to: "Finally I could not bear it anymore, physically and mentally. I asked my senior inmate to have me seen by a doctor" (Thaler 89). He was first placed in Dachau, then he moved to a smaller place called Hersbruck where they took much better care of him, then he was sent back to Dachau.

As I mentioned previously, Thaler had a lot of inspirations in his fight for survival. Thaler was not in the concentration camp because he was Jewish, it was

because he had fled to the mountains to avoid joining Hitler's army, Thaler was actually very invested in Christianity. His biggest two inspirations were his family and his beliefs, many times when he was down and felt like just giving in and dying, he would pray that he would once again return home again to see his family: "He was a deeply religious person. We often prayed together and not all secretly or quietly" (Thaler 140). In this he speaks of a comrade he met after being liberated by the Americans that was from Sarn Valley, the same place Thaler had come from. This was just one example of the times Thaler prayed during his time in Dachau and Hersbruck.

The historical time period of this book is essential to know about. This memoir is based all around the time period actually. As I have mentioned many times earlier, this book is based around the time of the Holocaust and the Second World War. Franz Thaler started his wretched journey to Dachau on the twenty third of September in 1944. He returned home after a long, life altering experience on August 14th 1945. Thaler almost spent an entire year fighting for his life in Dachau.

The word "Holocaust" actually comes from two Greek words, "holos" which means whole, and "kaustos" which means burned. Back in the time of Ancient Greece this term was used to describe a sacrifice and a burning of an altar. Then, in the times of Hitler, it took on a much worse, more terrifying definition. A lot of the times people think that Hitler's act was the first to want to take down the Jews, but it was not: "Though use of the term itself dates only to the 1870s, there is evidence of hostility toward Jews long before the Holocaust—even as far back as the ancient world" (History.com, The Holocaust). It is said that Roman authorities burned and destroyed the main Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Then, there was a peace treaty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and tolerance towards religious beliefs was put forth strongly.

The Second World War started quite a short time after the first, only two decades later. This was said to be the most horrible and gruesome war in history to this day. Thirty countries were fighting in World War II and the estimates for how many soldiers died in total go from fifty million to eighty five million. "Hitler's

invasion of Poland in September 1939 drove Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany, and World War II had begun" (History.com World War II History). After Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, the Americans entered the war as well. The war went on for four more horrible years and it was estimated that six million Jewish people were killed in German concentration camps.

In conclusion, I think that Thaler's story is very sad but it needs to be told, as he says, so that the story of the Holocaust stays unforgotten. The Holocaust is a tragic story and Thaler's inspiration and determination for survival was very eye opening. He suffers deeply and still comes out a wonderful person and that is incredible. I would one hundred percent recommend this book to anyone. It was very informative but it still did not go too deeply into the gruesome details which in my opinion was greatly appreciated. It was very informative and due to the fact that Thaler was not a Jew it gave a different story than most books about the Holocaust. It helped me to really understand the Holocaust more without have to be totally grossed out by the gory details.

Kimberly Rogers

Mr. McCaslin

History 7

1 May 2015

The Story of an Italian Man in a German Concentration Camp

For my third historical book report, I read an autobiography entitled *Unforgotten*. Written by Franz Thaler, *Unforgotten* is the true story of Thaler's experiences during the Holocaust. Although an Italian citizen, Thaler was brought to a concentration camp when he refused to join the German military. Even though he is tortured and treated inhumanely, he doesn't beg the reader for pity; he expresses his feelings and tells the straight story. Thaler also specifically describes his pain and hunger vividly. I chose to read this book because Mr. McCaslin recommended it to our class and because it sounded unusual and interesting.

Years after his liberation, Thaler runs into the man who had caused his imprisonment, but he does not react with anger, even though he feels very scared. He says: "I was overwhelmed by the fear which I had always had in the past of men like this" (Thaler 161). He shows great maturity and greets him like an old acquaintance, which is a much better treatment than the man deserves. He says: "[He] offered to shake my hand by way of greeting, to which I responded" (Thaler 161). Thaler isn't remembering this man bitterly, with a cold and shrunken heart. He also writes: "Something like fighting spirit rose up within me: now I would defend myself" (Thaler 161). So he won't get sent to such a terrible type of place again, Thaler is standing up for himself against those who hurt him. Thaler wants to let others know that what happened was wrong, and that the wounds of the war were still too fresh to discuss quite yet.

Thaler also writes in much detail about his physical pain and injuries. He says: "I scratched myself day and night. My whole body was covered with sores" (Thaler 88). This must have been a difficult experience to write about because it was one of the worst moments of his life. It forced him to think of a time of extreme physical pain and how that effected him mentally. He writes: "I felt so miserable that day I thought my life was over" (Thaler 97). Thaler writes about this type of depressing thoughts many times throughout the book. It helps to draw the reader into the story and experience how the author felt. Also, the way Thaler gives us a

window into his Christian faith is open and clear, in the way he suggests it in most chapters. Thaler's clear, brave description of pain and hopelessness makes his writing strong and true.

Unforgotten takes place during World War II, a war caused by many issues. Most of the issues evolved from those that caused World War I, such as imperialism, which is when one country tries to take over other countries. This happened during both wars, with Germany wanting to conquer other European nations, but they did not have the strength to take over all of the armies of the Allied forces. Imperialism was also demonstrated when Japan invaded China and other parts of Asia. During the inter-war years, the Germans went through a hard time economically (partially because of World War I sanctions), and the people were looking for new, different ideas, which were supplied by Adolf Hitler, who came into power in 1933. By the time the war began, he was putting his ideas into action using anti-Semitic propaganda and concentration camps. However, although most people think Hitler was the main cause of the war, it was actually a result of the events from World War I not getting resolved properly when the first war ended and continuing on into the second World War.

Unforgotten, an autobiographical memoir by Franz Thaler, is captivating and detailed, pulling you into the frightening story of this man's escape from the concentration camp of Dachau. His story is about his trials and tests during that time. I learned a lot about the non-Jewish prisoners in the death camps and about the Dachau camp in general. It was also like a time machine, transporting me into life in the early 1940s. I loved this book because of how much emotion the author poured into it, considering how simply it was written. I would recommend *Unforgotten* to my friends as a useful learning tool and a window into the past; I think they would love it just as much as I did.

Julia Samuels 7th Grade

Unforgotten Book Report

The book *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler is a memoir, this book is a good read for people who want to learn about the Holocaust from a non-jewish Survivor's point of view. This book is about Thaler's life after he ran away from going to the German army (and an intro before that), and the hardships he had. He has to be brave, strong, and have enough hope and willpower to make it through the horrific tragedy of the Holocaust. In *Unforgotten*, Thaler is pushed to his limits but keeps standing. This book shows how horrible the Holocaust was, what it was like and that it wasn't hard only for the Jews.

Thaler has to deal with such great difficulties in this book and this is mostly while he is a young adult. Through this experience Thaler changes forever. "He put the broom in my hands. In this position I had to hop up and down the whole corridor twice" (Thaler p70). This a minor thing compared to other things that have happened, but this shows that he has to work hard and be determined. He has to hop with that big broom for a long time until he finally comes home. Then more things come where he has to use his will power till it has been consumed by the cruel treatment he has received. "Everyone wanted to stand in a straight row, but it happened nevertheless that we were repeatedly subjected to these harassments two, three times" (Thaler 83). The SS guards took pleasure in beating these people up, but to still be standing is amazing. To have that strength, and for Franz Thaler to come out of the Holocaust not being horrible is another mystery. To hold in all of the anger and tears and fear from those people who turned him in and also the ones who hurt him and the ones who didn't stand up.

Finally the Americans come and rescue everyone from the horrible camps but they don't do a great job of it. They had to keep everyone somewhere else for a long time before they could go home, and Thaler had to starve for six days because of a food delay. "Most of us were soaked to the skin and we were all tormented by an indescribable hunger" (Thaler 132). They took terrible care of everyone and weren't prepared at all. I don't blame though because they weren't expecting anything like this but they could have had people make small fires for everyone. Thaler made it through and became a Survivor who has children and grandchildren and many more generations to come because he could let go and let the happiness come back.

World War II was a terrible thing but how did it all start? World War 2 is actually a continuation of World War I. Germany was left a mess and had a great amount of poverty. One reason for the beginning of WW2 is because of the guilt clause. Mostly the cause of WW2 was that Germany was in a bad place and needed a great leader to pull them to the top. Then Hitler appeared and told the truth and spoke about rebuilding Germany and doing great things but there is always someone to blame. He chose the Jewish people for unknown reasons and made them the bad guys. Hitler, who was crazy, and yet very clever, wanted to have more and avenge his country by getting rid of all the Jewish people everywhere. Who knows, if Hitler was never stopped, the world would be without Jewish people and people couldn't be open about being gay even more than they can't be right now. Hitler then thought up the horrific idea of what a concentration camp is. To use the Jewish people for work that might be dangerous for other citizens or cruel labor for people and if they couldn't work then they would die.

Franz Thaler is not Jewish nor has any Jewish bloodline, but he still went to Dachau. He was recruited by the army, but he didn't want to go, he knew it wasn't the right thing to do. So he ran away, but then he heard that if he didn't return his family would be killed. He returned and the court decided that he was to serve a sentence of ten years in Dachau. He did not serve his full ten years at Dachau because Dachau was liberated before he could. Then the Americans keep him away without food for six days until finally they let all Italians go. He then makes his journey home and does, return home.

This book is about a man who decided that Hitler's army was doing evil and for not joining the army, he faced a treacherous fate. *Unforgotten* shows how he had to have the mental power and the strength to survive the Holocaust and come out with at least a tiny part of his soul and heart left. To be able to come home still standing through all the trouble and walking he had to do. To only have Thaler's religion and faith to help him through the Holocaust. He was able to keep all the anger inside and start a family; no matter how many years after the Holocaust, it would be hard to do that. Yet he did. This book is a great story I would recommend to 13 year old people or older because it is still a sad and truthful story not appropriate for young children.

Bella Sanford

Mr. McCaslin

History 7

18 May 2015

Unforgotten by Franz Thaler Report

For my history book report, I read *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler. It is historical autobiography about Thaler's time in Dachau (along with some other smaller camps) and his turbulent relationships and conflicts after his concentration camp was liberated by the America. In this book, the author does not indulge on gory details and tells the story with great emotion. The main point of the book was to teach the public about a different side of the Holocaust, the side where Italians and Germans were sent to camps for being "anti-Hitler." I chose to read this book because I have always been interested in reading about the Holocaust and survivor stories because they constantly keep you worrying whether the victims will survive not.

The book starts out with Thaler as a countryman. In Italy where he lives, the Nazis have started to take over and they want to people to make a vote to support Hitler in the army and become German, or to stay Italian. "The Option, the 'vote', created a deep division in the people. Many families in Sarn Valley were also torn apart. Some of them decided to leave things as they were, others were very keen to 'vote German'" (Thaler 32). Thaler's family chose to stay Italian because he liked things the way they were. He eventually had to skip school because the teachers only wanted to teach German children and not traitors. As Thaler says in the book, "It went on like this for a few years" (Thaler 36).

Franz Thaler soon learned that he would have to serve up front in the German army when Hitler gained the upper hand and Italy was almost fully controlled by Nazis. In fact, he had no choice. "I desperately tried to find a way out, as I had already heard about too many of the atrocities which the Hitler regime had perpetrated. And so I decided to follow the advice of some of my friends and flee to the mountains. They promised to supply me with food. I was allowed to collect milk at night from one of them" (Thaler 39). He overcame many obstacles in that time period including: tricking Nazis, earning money for food by helping farmers, and engraving metal for extra money.

At this time he was very poor and lonely. Eventually, the Nazis threaten his family and Thaler turns himself in. He is sent to Dachau as a punishment and is sentenced for ten years.

The years that followed had Thaler traveling from prison camp to prison camp. First he was sent to Dachau, the worst camp he experienced. When he first arrived it was clean and organized. You have to understand that the Germans were very scientific and organized when it came to the process of distributing food, clothing, toiletries, or even death sentences. Although the camp was clean, it was freezing and there was no room for sitting down. Food and beverages were scarce. Thaler quickly learned that work was the only way to earn food. He and the fellow traitors wore different clothes from the Jews. "He explained to me the regulations which applied there and ordered me to follow them very strictly because every breach would be punished severely" (Thaler 73).

In the final third of the story, Thaler is finally liberated by the Americans and feels unimaginable joy. Some Italians and him go into the SS barracks, searching for food. They stumble upon some new clothing and quickly change out of their bug-infested clothes and into the guard clothing. When the Americans find them, they mistake them for Nazis and almost shoot them! When they realize that they are all skinny and limping, they send them to camps where they wait for 6 days without any food. Thaler is in terrible condition and wants to die. His toes are frostbitten and he has lice. He's extremely dirty and he's freezing because he has no provisions except a coat that another man gives him. Finally, Thaler returns home and reunites with his family. But, it's not over yet. At church, Thaler has to smile and compress the hatred he feels for the people that turned him in. "When we came nearer he went up to me smiling, in his usual way, and offered to shake my hand by way of greeting, to which I responded, After he had said 'Franz, hello, how are you?' he immediately turned to my siblings and said: 'Now you can no longer threaten me with retaliation'" (Thaler 161). He has to endure having everything taken away from him, and that's what makes him such an amazing person, being able to forgive evil, but not forget.

This book is set in Europe from 1939-1945. It was a continuation of the First World War. Hitler was a very brave soldier in WWI and so people believed that he really was good. Also, Germany was suffering greatly and went into economic depression. He

came into power by convincing people that he could create a better life for them. He became chancellor and then decided that he wanted to rule the world. Hitler was an evil genius and a great speaker. He convinced Germans that the Jews were the reason that they were living in such poverty. He created Nazi propaganda and brainwashed all the children. Soon, he gained control over many countries. Some by force, some by their own free will. Hitler was regarded as a hero. He created the concentration camps and systems, hoping to kill all the Jews. He succeeded in killing 6 million, but many got away. There was also a hidden holocaust where homosexuals, traitors, and handicap people were killed. Germany was very strong. But, eventually several countries including America and England joined up and stomped the Germans. All the concentration camps were liberated, a few Nazis shot. Hitler committed suicide on April 30th, 1945.

Fran Thaler lived in the time period that WWII happened, so he told the story accurately and efficiently. However, since it was translated from German, some sentences did not make much sense. I was somewhat confused about the names and sometimes his references were not clear. I still enjoyed the book. Franz Thaler wanted to educate young people about the hidden holocaust. His survivor story was different because, unlike the Jews, he had to go through many other hard trials before *and* after his time at Dachau. He survived only by convincing his mind that he would be okay, even though he endured many illnesses and injuries. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone interested in another side of the holocaust. But, if anyone is squeamish about death, do not read this book.

Natasha Weiss

Mr. Caz

History

19 May 2015

To Be Unforgotten

For my third book report I read Franz Thaler's *Unforgotten*, which is a nonfiction memoir of Thaler's time during the Holocaust. It had two publishings, one in 1988, and the second is 1999. Paul Crichton and Christl Kiener translated it. This book has less of a "main point" and is more the story of one man's struggles, though it illuminates the struggles of others. Franz Thaler, an Italian man who speaks German, is sentenced to ten years in Dachau as punishment for not consenting to be part of the German army. He faces incredible struggles and tests while there, and is eventually liberated by the Americans, and takes a grueling journey home. Franz Thaler is a victim caught in the outskirts of the Holocaust and is a courageous man who faces many obstacles. I read this book because our entire class read it for history, and I used it for my book report because Caz recommended that we did.

"When I was alone in the cell and had time to think, it soon became clear to me what I had done wrong before: you always had to jump at the hard job then you would be given an easier job"(Thaler 70). This in one of the first challenges Thaler begins to face. He is in such a horrible place that the above quotation is true. He is forced to do hard labor and work, while receiving very little food, and under many threats. He is essentially a slave, a "political prisoner", and so are all the people he is with.

"What will happen in the future? Will I perhaps, like many others in Dachau, lose my life due to starvation or disease or as a result of being beaten

to death? After such thoughts only one thing helped and that was prayer. I would probably have despaired otherwise" (Thaler 76-7). Thaler's life is pure torment and anguish. Pain and fear are an occurrence more regular than food. It is not a few tests that define his struggle, but thousands. Daily events weigh down on him more every day. Thaler is religious, and this gets him through a lot. Where others would have faltered Thaler holds to his faith.

The plight of Franz Thaler is stemmed from the Holocaust. The Holocaust (partly) comes from the World Wars. The World Wars have a few different causes. One of the causes is nationalism. Patriotism is one thing, but nationalism is too far. Two other -ism causes are militarism and imperialism. Many countries were building up their militaries and there were large advances in the technology of weapons. The European empires had spread thin and were conquering many places. (Top 5 Causes of World War 1).

Essentially, the cause of World War II, is World War I. World War II is a continuation of World War I. The Treat of Versailles also contributed to World War II. Under the haze of extreme bloodshed Hitler and the Nazi's thrived. When attention is drawn to other things awful things can be done, and almost no attention is paid to it. But another cause is Hitler himself. Though just that one cause it not enough for the entirety and magnitude of these horrors.

Franz Thaler got caught in the rippling effects of the Holocaust. He was not the one of the people the Holocaust set out to hurt. Instead he became entangled in the waves it created. He was put through scores of ordeals and lived to tell the tale. His religion and beliefs were one of the contributing factors of his survival.

I would recommend this book to a friend. Even though it made me sad and almost mad me cry, it is the kind of book that is worth it. It deals with

survival and of the horrors of our human past. We need to know the truth, and though these kinds of things are not "fun" to learn, they do need to be learned. A friend should read this book because it is deeply thoughtful and makes you wonder, which is always a good thing. Another reason a friend should read it is because it is history and evidence of an awful time, which Thaler survives through. We have to learn about these horrible times and I believe the title of this book explains all this: *Unforgotten*. This explains the sick and twisted things that happen, though it is not graphic. I would not recommend it to someone is much younger than 11. This book makes you reflect and contemplate. This is something that everyone should read.

Tea Wallmark

Mr. McCaslin

History 7

19 May 2015

Unforgotten History Book Report

For my book report I read *Unforgotten* by Franz Thaler, a narrated history book. It is a true story told by Thaler as he lives through World War II. He tells his story in immense detail, describing the terror of Hitler's rule. I believe the main point of this book is teaching the current children and people who weren't alive during Hitler's regime, how terrible and horrendous World War II really was. I think another important main point in the book was explaining why and how the war started. I enjoyed reading this book because of the personal insight I gained about World War II and its numerous causes.

There are countless examples of the torture that was inflicted upon the many people living in Europe and around the world at the time of the Second World War. This is a quotation from Thaler's book when him and his fellow prisoners experience pure abuse because of the difference between their cultures: "When we were marching we always had to sing, sometimes even Tyrolian songs, but usually dirty songs, the kind the SS enjoyed. When the guards noticed that someone was not joining in there was a hail of blows" (Thaler 96). This quotation explains the brutality of the rules of the SS guards. Even if you didn't believe in singing Tyrolian songs, you were forced to or else you would face an even worse beating. The SS guards did this just so they could enjoy themselves more. This is only one of the many terrible crimes the SS guards committed during World War II.

Another example of torture that Thaler survived was starvation. He went without food for days: "It was the fifth day without food and I no longer thought we could get any" (Thaler 133). These prisoners not only went without food for five days, they had been starved for many months in a row. This kind of torture is unbelievable and I cannot understand how Thaler survived this degree of mistreatment.

There are examples within the book that explain some of the causes of World War II. For instance, in this quotation from the beginning of the book: "The first signs of my journey to Dachau were already evident in 1939. In June of that same year Nazi Germany

and Fascist Italy had started the resettlement of the South Tyrolians” (Thaler 31). This was one of the numerous causes of the Second World War. The book discusses many of these causes and the mistreatment of the South Tyrolians was one of them.

Thaler survived the holocaust because of the faith in his religion. He referred to this faith many times and claims it as the savior he was hoping for. From experience hope is always necessary when in hard situations.

The book *Unforgotten* takes place during the time of World War II. The Kiener press in Germany published the book. The original name of the book, in German, is Unvergessen. This is a quotation from a website that explains the steps to control of the world used by the Nazis: “Hitler used his own skills of oratory to appeal to the patriotism of the German people by promising to break free of the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. His aim of ending the payment of reparations was especially popular” (theholocaustexplained.org). This was one of the ways Hitler gained power. He fabricated the lies he had in mind by appealing to the audience and using propaganda.

I also discovered there were many changes within Thaler throughout the book. One of the main changes within his character was his perspective of freedom: “From this moment on I forgot everything that had happened before. One must have experienced what we had gone through in order to be able to understand what freedom meant for us at this moment” (Thaler 123). The imprisoned people trapped in these death camps were treated so badly that they didn’t even remember what it felt like to be free. Freedom had become a foreign subject to these men. Thaler learns what he should value in his life. Through this experience, he has learned why freedom plays such a huge role in his life.

I found many grammatical and spelling errors in this book. I found many typos that could have been avoided. I also believe the book could have been further translated to make sense in the English language. I appreciate that the translator, Christl Kiener, chose to show that Thaler is very illiterate, since he only received a fourth grade education, but some parts were confusing to me. This adds a feeling of empathy towards Thaler. But, I enjoyed reading this book because of the authentic feel I received.

The main point in the book *Unforgotten* is expressing the terror in which the people of Germany and many surrounding countries lived during the Second World War. I learned a lot while reading this book and would think others would as well. Overall, I

loved this book. I would recommend the book to people who enjoy learning about the causes and torture present in the two World Wars. I loved the way Thaler expressed his feelings in this book. It really made me feel like I was living in one of the death camps with him. I took pleasure in reading *Unforgotten* and I would enjoy reading other books on the same topic. _