**Tori Roser
Paragraphs on Personal Reactions**

***Remembrance and a Better World***As horrific as World War II was, I believe that it was critical in showing the darkest side of humanity. Growing up I’ve always heard, “history repeats itself”. As naïve as it is, I hope more than anything that WWII was the last World War on this planet. Outright hatred based on race and beliefs, super powers using advanced weaponry, dictators attempting to create dynasties, and millions dead over a few men’s beliefs. What a waste.

There are hundreds of lessons to take away from the war. Many more than I believed going into this course. The first is that **one person can, and will, change the world**. Hitler was able to come to power and start a global fight within a decade. Even with a book stating the nastiness of his beliefs and plans, people bought into his ideology. He laid out just how cruel and horrifying his thoughts were, but no one fought it.

The next is to **never doubt the power of groupthink and the first follower**. People often put too much emphasis behind the leader. The critical component of a leader’s power is their first follower: the first person to stand behind them and encourage others to do the same. That’s when a leader has true room to lead and grow. After the first person buys into an idea, others think it must be okay. Within years, millions believed in the Fuehrer and in the Third Reich. They believed it so much that they were blind to the concentration camps in their backyards, to the true intent behind their leader, and to their “prosperity”.

The third lesson is to **remember the results of atomic weaponry**. The US is the only country to have used weapons of mass destruction. This is why we are so keen to jump on any other country that is attempting to make or test them. We’ve seen what happens to countries where they are used. We know their power and horror. There are enough atomic bombs on the planet to kill the human population multiple times. Their use would end this world within seconds.

My final lesson is the most critical to keeping peace in the world. It rests in every human’s actions and decisions. Learn to let religion just be beliefs, not law. **Separate church and state**. Religion is so important to some people. I understand that. Everyone needs something to believe in. But some twist their God’s words to believe that they are killing people for the right reason. They believe their holy books condemn some for their choices and allow others to pass judgment. Every time a decision is made based on religion, someone will get hurt.

People ask me why I’m not religious, and it’s a long explanation. If there is a God out there who says that flying planes into buildings will send me to heaven, I don’t want to believe in him. If there is a God out there who says killing millions of people who believe in a different religion is okay, I don’t want to believe in him. If there is a God out there who says men who love men and women who love women don’t deserve an eternity of happiness after putting them on this Earth, I don’t want to believe in him. But you see, these are just beliefs. Each religion has a different set of them. None of us knows which one is right, if any, until we are dead. So why do we start wars and genocides over it? Religion is a set of beliefs. Not laws. Stick to what is morally right. Not what thousand year old texts state.

If you look carefully, it is so easy to see. Political battles rest in religious beliefs. School structures and lessons are impacted by religion. It is everywhere. But wherever the biggest struggles lie, religion is usually behind it. Why do people not see it? What war wasn’t started, at the root, based on religion? The difference in ideologies has, for thousands of years, killed billions.

Separate church and state. Our founding fathers knew that it was imperative in creating an equal country with honest protection for all. It’s time we remembered it.

***Friendship***I think it was pretty obvious during the trip that I really struggle in groups for long periods of time. There is way too much to experience and see for me to want to wait to hear what everyone else wants to do. Going to Europe only happens so often. I believe that it’s the time to be selfish and experience what you want to experience and learn about what interests you. The time the group takes to deliberate what makes everyone happy is time wasted. I like to know where I’m going and what I’m doing ahead of time. There is no reason to stand around and debate, the world is waiting for us.

I don’t know to call that negative or positive though. I think my love of learning hindered my love of classmates, but it didn’t negatively impact my trip. Even going to dinner would turn into a 20 minutes debate. Mia and I would already be seated and have our food ordered when the group would finally decide to go wherever we went. What a waste of time! If that happened during every meal for the entire trip, that is 6 hours wasted! That’s just for meal decisions! I’m too impatient and too ready to see things to waste that kind of time on another continent. I’m sure my classmates thought I was anti-social or uninterested at times, but I really just wanted to see everything that I could while we were there. It was nothing against them.

As for my love of teachers, whether it was Professor Zalar, Jess, or our tour guide, I really have a passion for learning what others know. Everyone we listened to was well read and versed in their topics and gave an intense and deep analysis and reflection when asked for one. I’d rather spend time with teachers than with students. You can learn from both, but professors and advisors have lived and seen more. There is no fighting that it was always a more challenging and fun lesson when one was involved.

***What You Get Out of International Education***There is no better way to learn than through immersion. Whether it is a specific subject or a language, traveling to the origin of what you’re trying to learn is the absolute best way to grasp material. For 14 weeks, we read, analyzed, reflected, watched, debated, and discussed World War II in our class. It wasn’t until we reached the beaches of Normandy that you could see the invasion, and why it was such a fail. It’s not until you stand in front of thousands of graves that the death toll means anything. It isn’t until you see where Churchill lived that you understand the night raids and their power. You can read as much as you want, but until you see and experience first hand what you’re reading, they’re just words.

***How This Course Changed Me as a Person***Over the past semester, I think it is obvious that I’ve become a better writer, reader, and overall student. Professor Zalar pushed all of us to be better. Often times, my professors and teachers are extremely relaxed when it comes to grading my work. They expect that it is an A and just grade it as such. It’s been a long time since a Professor took and put so much time and effort into making sure that I grow. It’s something that I will never be able to thank Professor Zalar for.

As for the course material, WWII has always been a fascinating subject to me. When I was 18 years old, I visited Dachau. It was a life shattering moment. I don’t know if I will ever be more compassionate, sympathetic, hopeless, and lost than I was that day. However, this course really opened my eyes to how dirty and bloody the war really was on all sides. Each nation had a fault in the war, but most had hundreds. Seeing how much is hidden in our textbooks growing up really raises flags on what is being hidden from us in our daily lives.

Finally, when it comes to morality, I believe I was one of the most honest in our course. I believe that I’ve always had a good moral compass and done what is best for me, for those I love, and for the greater good. I believe a lot of people tailored their answers in our course to what they thought might get them a better grade. I said what needed to be said and what followed the facts lined with a moral compass. It’s not easy being the bad guy, and I received remarks from classmates after class sessions about comments, but I believe all of us had to draw the line somewhere on most of the topics we discussed. Not to bring it back to religion, but I think my distance from religion made morality an easier subject. There was no commandment or verse holding me back from saying what should be said. For example, during the atomic bomb debate, I believe everyone was trying their hardest to grasp the details and overall impact of atomic weaponry. But when the opposing side opened with a line about God and the need to save lives, I had to stop for a second. The bombs meant less lives would be lost! How could they believe that they didn’t? They let religion dictate a decision that, morally, should have put them on the other side of the debate. It’s something that I’m still trying to understand, but I know that I’m right. Morally speaking, I believe I stayed true to myself and to my beliefs throughout the course. I’m proud of my responses and stances. Sure, new perspectives impacted what was thought to be true, but I never waivered in my understanding or logical reasoning. I think that’s what sets me apart.