

Dear Mr Braun,

My name is Amandine Telliez. I was one of many others who heard your talk on the afternoon of Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March, at Voltaire Senior High School.

Firstly, I wanted you to know just how much I was moved by your talk. How could anyone be unaffected by what happened to you and to so many others who died? I was absolutely spellbound by what you told us. As a real-life experience, it is forever imprinted on my heart. That Friday you talked of “teaching about life” but above all you made me appreciate how happy I was – happy to be alive.

I admire your physical resilience, as well as the emotional resilience you had to have. Such an extraordinary will to live.

I have always been fascinated when family and friends, having lived during the 90s told me about their youth. I find out so many things from what they say about that time, a time different to mine. Through them I am able to experience some of it. They take me on their journey.

So I will tell you something in confidence. It’s a true story, of a man born in 1927 who was abandoned by his parents when he was just a baby. He never knew his parents but he was later able to track down his brothers and sisters. He fled the North of France during the Second World War. On the way, something happened that meant he had to hide for several days in a barrel half filled with water. He had to get away from the Germans. But not just that. A French policeman pointed a gun at him. Luckily for him, a woman who was by herself, pretended to be lost and asked the policeman for directions. This distracted the policeman and he lowered his gun for a moment. This allowed the man to get away and thus he escaped being deported. He was 18 years old during the war, and he met a widow who was 28 (her husband had been killed in the war). She had four children, the eldest of whom was nine years old. This man took on the woman and her children and at night he stole food in order to feed them. Then he married the woman and raised her four children as his own. If I am speaking so well of this man it is because he is my grandfather. He often talked to me about his life and I loved listening to him, just as I loved listening to you on Friday.

You achieved the promise you made to yourself, to become a doctor. What could be better? I think that nowadays nothing and no one can stop someone becoming what they want. I sincerely hope that the coming generations will not succumb to ingratitude, hatred or any kind of exclusion. But the rise of the National Front in the last few years really scares me. How can they believe that French society is only for the French? In this European era, we should all be friends. Whatever, I am determined to fight racism.

Since I was little, from the age of 10, I have wanted to travel and be an English teacher. In a few months I will enrol to study Foreign Languages at university.

Do you know, when you told the story of the Gods hiding their blessings in only the most enlightened beings? I am sure in some ways you have found your blessings which, I think, rest in your kindness. It is no exaggeration to say that I know very few men who are capable of questioning if they themselves would have acted like the SS, if they had been brought up in

the same circumstances. Indeed, you clearly said that the SS were no doubt good family men, and that all people are capable of both the best, and the worst.

All my friends were amazed by what you told us on Friday. Before I sign off I wish to thank you so much and to wish you all the very best as you continue with your visits to schools.

Thank you and goodbye from Amandine Telliez

Amandine Telliez  
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*Saint Cloud, 20 September, 1999*

My Dear Amandine,

While I was tidying up my office I came across your letter, amongst others that I had regretfully neglected to answer. I must tell you I am ashamed of myself for having done that, but I still feel it is worth replying to you now, albeit so belatedly.

Your grandfather's story really moved me. What courage and kindness to have taken on those children in the terrible times which were the last world war.

You can be very proud of him, he certainly deserves it.

So now you are studying foreign languages. It's wonderful to immerse yourself in customs and traditions that are different to ours. Perhaps in this way, and through studying, we realise all people are brothers and sisters, and that no culture is superior to any other. Wanting to impose a particular culture on people who have their own history is the beginning of racism. It presupposes that our culture is better than another. As you have already seen, you will learn that to respect another history is to respect its culture.

You said some other lovely things to me in your letter. But I have to say, I am just a man like any other. I have no special qualities and if my awareness is more acute and leads me to consider the suffering of others and tries to address it, that is only because my suffering was so extreme. It is the same, I hope, for all who have know horror.

If my visit to Voltaire High School has engendered feelings of love and respect in the hearts of some students, as I have for all human beings, then I am very happy and it gives me the strength to continue with this work.

As for you, take care to always be aware of racist acts and discourse, as you already are. This will expose the beast that some people carry within them and will also prevent their malevolence spreading to others.

With warmest wishes and once again my apologies for my late reply.  
Sam Braun