

# Liberty Ron Haviv

First there were the rumors. Then there was the evidence - there were camps, official and not, hidden rooms, gymnasiums, halls and factories in plain sight, farms and schools. Didn't matter which side - they all had them. It was a part of war. This was obvious for enemy soldiers, less so for civilians. The elderly, the children, the women were often taken in the desire to imprison the Other. The most basic desire was to completely control the movement of people. Whether we call them detainees, prisoners, or people to be questioned, it doesn't matter. These people were being denied their liberty.

The moment the hands are raised in defeat, the gun is put to the back of the head, people are marched into the room, once he or she knows this is happening, the feeling of the loss of control is overwhelming. Some wound up behind actual bars, others in barns.

"Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." That's a core part of the United States Declaration of Independence. Words that I grew up with, often assuming they were words that the whole world knew, respected, and utilized. But even though the words - especially Liberty - were expected to be the foundation of the world I knew; the actual meaning was never clear. What is liberty? What does it look like?

Words like Liberty or Freedom are often used in conversation, invoked for causes, frequently brought up when there is a denial of the definition. To see the loss of liberty up close - the fear pervading everywhere, the desire for survival, the interminable waiting for the next step, and the hoping for the eventual release - is devastating. Liberty is something so basic that without it, there can be nothing.

Wars come to a close at some point. The bullets stop flying, the bombs stop exploding. Everyone who has been in the theater is affected. For those who survived the personal interactions - the ones who lived in the constant not knowing of what would happen next, with their existence in someone else's hands - there is no complete closure.

War reminds us of our own fragility, and of how temporary the idea of liberty can be for everyone.

— Ron Haviv, 2020