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Making a stand...the importance of standing up.

My name is Sophie Scholl and I am 21 years old. Today is the 22nd of February 1943 and it is also the day I am going to die. Before the sun sets I will be executed along with my brother, Hans and our great friend Christoph. I am scared. But I am not sorry for anything I have done and you will see why.

You seem shocked and you might well ask: "How did this happen?" "Surely there must be a mistake. Weren't you an enthusiastic and obedient member of the Hitler Youth?" You might also remember me marching proudly past your front door in my uniform on my way to a rally. Yes, this is how things began for us, because, like most Germans, we were raised to support our government and be proud of our country. But we were also taught to think independently by our father, Robert, and this set us on a different path.

Our father was mayor of our town, Forchtenberg, and, as such, a respected citizen. Although he never forbade my older brother and I from joining the Hitler Youth or, in fact, participating in Nazi activities, our childhood was atypical because he encouraged us to think for ourselves. I remember him telling us: "What I want most of all is that you live in uprightness and freedom of spirit, no matter how difficult that proves to be." These words sat in my brain like a pebble lodged in a shoe, chafing away, until I paid them heed." And when Hans and I began to see that our government was in fact an evil one, bent on sending millions of innocent people to their deaths, we knew the Hitler Youth was no place for us. We realised that, in the name of freedom and the greater good of the German nation, Hitler and the Nazis were enslaving and destroying the German people.

The ugliness of war and the arrest of my father, who was reported for calling Hitler "God's Scourge", were the catalysts that drove my disillusionment with the Nazi party to smoulder and ignite the flame of resistance. Hans and I knew that we had to do something to fight the enormous evil unfolding in front of our eyes. We couldn't let our father's courage in speaking out against the regime go unsupported.

But... What could we do? Resistance to the great Nazi machine is extremely difficult and dangerous. They are always looking out for dissent. The Nazis are like the proverbial eagle eye, waiting to strike and arrest any person perceived to not be toeing the line. They demand one hundred percent loyalty, no questions asked! And there are many informers among our fellow people, so it is hard to know who to trust.

Hans acted first. Last year in June he gathered a small group of trustworthy and like-minded friends at our university, the University of Munich. During the next month they wrote the first of six pamphlets denouncing the atrocities of the Nazis and calling for Germans to join the resistance. I found out about this and insisted on joining the group. We made thousands of copies and distributed the pamphlets in every public place we could and even organised couriers to take them to other cities.

We increased our opposition to the Nazis by painting slogans on public buildings. We chose words like "Hitler mass murder" or "freedom". It was all so risky but we felt we had no option but to protest the crimes the Nazi regime were perpetrating.

Four days ago, on 18 February 1943, we were betrayed by a man working at the university. Today Hans, Christoph and I were tried and found guilty of treason. We have been sentenced to death by people who are cowardly and cruel. Yes, we are afraid, but we refuse to show these people our fear. We will never let them see that.

You might ask "Why? Why did you put yourselves in such great danger when you could have stood aside and saved yourselves?"

My answer is that the times we live in have called for a kind of courage I think we all have inside us. I believe in humanity and in the right for all humans to be treated equally. Every single human being of whatever race, religion or creed, should have the right to live in peace and express their views. All the members of the White Rose Movement are there because of their morals, their belief in equality and the need to fight persecution in any form. As I face the end of my life I can only say that I have no regrets, that I fought as hard as I could in the way I knew how, and that I know our actions have not been in vain. I strongly believe that most people are good, and that the fight against oppression in all its forms will continue. In Germany's future and in the future of the world, I believe coming generations will learn to value respect for all people and to voice their dissent wherever they find oppression. In this way the spirit of our movement will live on, and everything we did will have been worth it.

As with the White Rose Movement so too, we in South Africa, need to continue fighting against injustice in any form. We need to stand up to protect freedom of expression and to preserve human rights. In the same way that the Nazis had no regard for the rights of the Jewish people, many South Africans faced similar challenges under the Apartheid Regime. We should never forget. We should, instead, remain vigilant. Protecting rights, expression and freedom!