

**Second Place Winner**  
**Division II – 10-12<sup>th</sup> Grades**  
*Beyond the Innate Flaws: An Unsung Hero*  
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Every person is born into the world restrained by shackles of human nature. Although not all aspects of human nature are unpropitious, they include qualities such as egocentrism and animosity that hinder our ability to grow in genuine fortitude and virtue. However, these burdening components of human nature can be overcome by those who strive to look beyond themselves on a consistent basis. Moral courage to me is the act of conquering the innate qualities of self-greed and bitterness to look beyond oneself and take initiative for the greater good. The story of a German reporter named Jürgen Hinzpeter is a vivid illustration of one person's small voice making a momentous impact in the world.

It was in 1980 when tens of thousands of South Korean civilians united to voice their opposition against their new dictator, General Chun Doo-Hwan, who replaced the previous leader, Park Chung-Hee, through a military coup in the previous year. In response to the dissent expressed by the waves of protesters, Chun Doo-Hwan declared martial law and took away all natural rights of the Gwangju citizens (Kim). Although martial law is typically utilized in order to bring peace and stability back into the country, it only initiated greater violence and division in Gwangju. Not only did the new leaders bludgeon, teargas, and shoot thousands of innocent people to their demise, they also kept Gwangju closed off to the rest of the world and shut down all media and communication sources in order to keep the events a secret and prevent citizens from receiving any help from the outside. Eventually, hundreds of bodies piled up on the outskirts of the city, and the number of civilians left to stand up against the government declined rapidly (Kim). At this point, it was nearly impossible for civilians to achieve victory against the army. It wasn't until one unsung hero, Jürgen Hinzpeter, risked his life for a nation that wasn't even his own, and utilized his small voice and one camera to put an end to the murderous acts of Chun.

With no aid allowed in from the outside, Gwangju became a bloody arena for fully-armed Korean soldiers and helpless citizens who could do nothing but lay down on the ground in protest. Fully aware that foreigners would not be allowed in Gwangju and knowing that he would become an easy target to identify, Hinzpeter made his way to Gwangju, for he wasn't thinking about himself; he was looking out for thousands of Gwangju civilians and putting their need to be saved over his own need to be safe. He miraculously made it past the military checkpoints and later became one of the few people to witness and survive to speak of the city in its bloody uprising. When all media sources in Gwangju were muzzled by the martial law, Hinzpeter took a huge leap of courage and filmed the soldiers' gruesome treatment of the civilians. He ran the risk of being caught by the army cordon and being questioned by the military junta. He also had several near-death experiences. Regardless, Hinzpeter took the camera film and hid it in a large cookie box wrapped in gold foil and immediately took the filmed evidence back to Tokyo where he could broadcast Gwangju's nightmares to the world (Sang-hun). Until then, Chun Doo Hwan's junta blamed the "vicious rioters" for the casualties, saying the military had been there

only to protect people; Hinzpeter's footages showed otherwise, exposing those assertions to be blatant lies and bringing justice to the innocent civilians who were fighting for democracy.

After learning about this pivotal moment in Korean history, the valiant actions of Jürgen Hinzpeter were ingrained into my mind and inspired me a great deal. The fact that Hinzpeter risked his life to join in on the fight for democracy during this perilous period and used his skills to bring justice to civilians *in a country that wasn't his own* exhibited genuine selflessness to me. Although Hinzpeter was not famous and did not have great platforms to speak from like many acknowledged heroes do, he used his talents of filming to make prominent steps to helping the city of Gwangju recover and rebuild. Growing up, I would often hear personal anecdotes told by my parents about this ruthless incident and the long-lasting fight for Democracy in Korea; however, it never really struck me just how brutal this period truly was. Ultimately, without Hinzpeter and his bold decisions, it is hard to say whether my parents or I would have even been alive today. Listening to the turmoils of my family's life in Korea and the peaceable way Hinzpeter saved a population from being wiped out, I have developed an interest and passion for foreign affairs and problem solving in diplomatic manners. In fact, joining Model UN has allowed me to practice the skills of negotiation and compromise, and has helped me keep an open mind on all perspectives of a situation and visualize the world as a bigger picture. Hinzpeter's story also inspired me to use my voice to advocate for organizations such as the Ronald McDonald Foundation which supports financially struggling families, or initiate blood drives at school to help victims of Hurricane Harvey and the Las Vegas Shooting. Although it is beyond my capabilities to change the world in one brilliant stroke like many heroes are depicted to do, my goal is to better the community one step at a time. After all, it is the ordinary people with grand hearts, such as Jürgen Hinzpeter, who shape history.

In times of turmoil, it becomes the hardest to display moral courage; those are the times when it is easiest to stray from what is right. Nonetheless, Jürgen Hinzpeter's single, selfless act of devotion in such a time set Gwangju free from military abuse and shaped history which many Koreans, including myself, will eternally be grateful for.

#### Works Cited

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