

NO RESTING PLACE HOLOCAUST POLAND

**EARTH DO NOT COVER MY BLOOD;
LET THERE BE NO RESTING
PLACE FOR MY OUTCRY!**

JOB 16:18

NO RESTING PLACE HOLOCAUST POLAND



"Holocaust Poland" pilgrim Natalie Ward reflects on her visit to Belzec in 2011.

NO RESTING PLACE **HOLOCAUST POLAND**

BY RICK HALPERIN & DENISE GEE PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHERRY AIKMAN



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FOREWORD

IN 2005, TWO EXPERIENCES profoundly changed my life—and ultimately would help transform the lives of others.

That spring, while pursuing a master of liberal studies degree at SMU, I took my first human rights course: Prof. Rick Halperin's comprehensive class, "America's Dilemma: The Struggle for Human Rights." I found it troubling for a number of reasons.

Mainly, at 47, why was I just learning about so many humanitarian atrocities? Why wasn't I more aware of ongoing human rights abuses? And why wasn't this subject something we taught our children? I wanted to learn and experience more, so in December I took myself and my two sons on SMU's two-week "Holocaust Poland" trip, which Dr. Halperin had been leading for nearly a decade.

Our travel group was comprised of about a dozen people willing to spend the holiday season seeing where the Nazis systematically murdered 5 million so-called "lesser" people—Jews, Slavs, political dissidents, homosexuals and others—during World War II.

Reflecting on that time, my mind takes me to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where, during a walk through the killing complex, I was both alone in my thoughts and surrounded by the dead, whose fears and sorrows were palpable.

Entering the crematoria, where ovens had incinerated more than a million people, a wave of grief washed over me. I made my way to an empty, adjacent room—and in that space, I became so overcome with emotion and nausea that all I wanted to do was get out of there. I didn't though; I sat there and I felt it. Only later did I learn it had been where the bodies of the dead were piled up before being burned.

Though that's just one of many powerful moments I've had during my human rights education, it was the first time I recognized the value of witnessing—understanding how atrocities continue to affect our lives and how important human rights awareness is.

I also realized how vital such educational opportunities are to ensure we confront and prevent human rights crimes. I knew I wanted to provide this learning opportunity to young people.

So at the start of 2006, my sister, Gayle, along with our family foundation, would push human rights education to the forefront. We chose to fund the groundbreaking, interdisciplinary Embrey Human Rights Program at SMU.

The Dedman College of Humanities & Sciences program, directed by Dr. Halperin, makes SMU one of only seven universities in the U.S. to offer

an undergraduate degree in human rights (plus minor- and graduate-level studies). It provides more than 100 human rights and social justice courses; student and teacher scholarships; engaged learning trips in this country and abroad; community-service partnerships; and compelling public events.

Our mission? To help SMU students become socially responsible global citizens—and we have accomplished that: Hundreds of enlightened and engaged "world changers" have used their human rights degrees to build personally and professionally rewarding careers in law, government, business, education, nongovernmental agencies, engineering, you name it. That's immensely encouraging, given our imperative to never allow any generation to forget what happened during the Holocaust—and more important, what caused it.

We hope this book, and everything our program offers, will encourage you to see the world in a different light. Let's commit ourselves to cultivating open minds and hearts, boundless curiosity and social activism, and exemplifying our program's credo: There is no such thing as a lesser person.

— **Lauren Embrey** SMU '80, '06
The Embrey Family Foundation
Dallas, Texas



In remembrance lies the
secret of redemption.

– Rabbi Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760)

INTRODUCTION

FUELED BY A MYTHOLOGY of racial and military might, Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, ignited two episodes of cataclysmic destruction: The Second World War, which left 60 million dead and Europe in ruins—and the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question," the Third Reich's industrialized slaughter of 11 million "lives unworthy of living."

As the most meticulously documented genocide in history—recognized as the Holocaust (Greek for "burnt offering"), or Shoah (Hebrew for "catastrophe")—the Nazi-led racial war of annihilation would consume 6 million Jews and 5 million other imagined enemies: ethnic Slavs (Poles, Czechs, Russians); Roma/Sinti ("Gypsies"); homosexuals; people with physical and mental disabilities; prisoners of war (primarily Soviets); and political and religious dissidents, from Communists to Jehovah's Witnesses.

As Reich leader Adolf Hitler had expounded in his 1925 treatise, *Mein Kampf*, for Germany's ethnic "Aryan master race" to survive and flourish, it would need to acquire resource-rich "*Lebensraum*," or "living space" in the east. Colonization would allow the incoming "superior people" to clear the territory of its inferior ones—chiefly, those Hitler deemed mankind's mortal enemy: the Jews. And since Poland had allowed Europe's largest population of Jews to thrive there for more than eight centuries, it would sadly become the epicenter of their extermination.

Poland will forever grapple with its forced role in hosting the Nazis' expansive network of grim killing fields and forests, ghettos and prisons, and more than 450 concentration/labor camp complexes—six designed solely for killing: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek. In these places alone, more than 3 million people would be sadistically murdered in terrifyingly quick or agonizingly slow ways.

In each German-occupied country, Jews and others labeled as biological or ideological threats underwent an elaborately bureaucratic process of statelessness and dehumanization in which they were classified, publicly humiliated, disenfranchised, robbed of their possessions, rounded up, crammed into ghettos and, amid filth and starvation, were forced to provide slave labor. Those who survived that ordeal next faced "resettlement" to the east, spending days or weeks in cramped boxcars, enduring conditions far worse than German animals fated for slaughter.

Once at their final destination—a place of unmitigated cruelty—the majority of people were stripped of their belongings (including their hair), beaten, shot in mass graves they themselves had to dig, or killed by poison gas, torture, hanging or lethal injection.

Those kept alive to provide slave labor likely died from exhaustion, starvation, exposure, medical experimentation or outright murder before they, like their fellow prisoners, would be reduced to ash and bone in furnaces or pyres, and their remains dumped into giant pits or waterways.

The Nazis' mechanized mass-murder efficiency proved horrifically successful: In one eight-month span, from April to November 1942, 2.5 million people were killed in about 250 days, accounting for the brutal murder of some 10,000 people each day.

While it's easy to become numb to the overwhelming inhumanity shown to Shoah victims and survivors, we need to learn why such crimes have occurred, and more important, how to prevent them.

Born from the epic tragedy of the Holocaust was a global framework of international and humanitarian law that was created for genocide prevention and accountability.

Actually, the term "genocide"—rooted in the Greek word "genos" (for "tribe or race") and "-cide" (for "killing")—was first used in 1944 by

Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, whose research aided the Nuremberg Trials, at which top Nazi officials were prosecuted from 1945 to 1946.

Two years later, the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide would follow, as would our world's first moral compass: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Though humanity vowed "never again" to allow atrocities such as the Holocaust to occur, they have—in Cambodia in the 1970s, Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s, Darfur in 2003—resulting in 3.2 million more brutal and senseless acts of murder.

*"The road to Auschwitz was built by hate
but paved with indifference."* –Historian Ian Kershaw

My life's work as a history and human rights educator and peace activist would be greatly shaped by the turbulent events of 1968, when I was a college sophomore studying abroad in Paris. That year America, and the world, lost two of its most powerful voices for peace—the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert Kennedy—prompting a generation of young people everywhere to rally against intolerance, brutality and injustice. That same year many of us would look to the recently created Amnesty International as a beacon for enlightenment, activism and hope. Also that year I would travel outside France to encounter the first Holocaust sites I would ever visit, initially in Italy, then in Germany. Deeply affected by them, I was horrified to see what atrocities can occur when the world shrugs.

To advance my understanding of the Holocaust, over the years I would visit most of Europe's former concentration and labor camps. But as the Iron Curtain in the east began to lift, nothing had prepared me for what I would see in Poland beginning in 1983.



Compared to Holocaust sites in Germany, which seemed unnervingly sterile, Poland's sites were more like raw, open wounds—physically neglected and emotionally rejected. After finding cab drivers to take me to the former camps, what I discovered shook me to my core.

Some places looked as though the Germans had only recently left. At Majdanek, for instance, mounds of shoes stretched as far as the eye could see. Other sacred sites had become makeshift dumping grounds or dog parks. In some cases children could be found sledding snow-covered hills of compacted bits of human ash and bone; and people with trowels, pails and metal detectors were digging for valuables. It was beyond disturbing. How could so many millions who died in these places be remembered, or not remembered, so callously? I committed myself to returning to these places and paying my respects each year forward, which I have done.

Poland's acceptance of its traumatic past has ebbed and flowed, but it's made monumental strides to excavate and preserve Holocaust sites, remember the victims and recognize the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Poles who risked their own lives to save Jews and others.

In keeping with my visits to Poland over the past 30 years—and trips led there on behalf of SMU for more than 20 of them—is the first part of this book's title, "No Resting Place." Inspired by an inscription on a wall at Belzec, the Old Testament passage from the Book of Job best conveys the physical and mental commitment many of us have made to never forget the 11 million victims of the Holocaust, and the millions who continue to be impacted by it.

Since no amount of ink and paper can adequately express the incomprehensible, this book strives to be a work of heart and art. It's the Embrey Human Rights Program's effort to encapsulate, via emotive words and pictures, what hundreds of us have experienced over the years.

Many wonder why we travel to Eastern Europe this time of year, but pilgrims consider the timing invaluable. Even relatively brief exposure to the frigid conditions camp prisoners endured makes an immediate and lasting impression. So does spending the last two weeks of December 5,000 miles away from loved ones, whom we all vow never to take for granted.

Certainly we'll never take for granted our program's champions, Lauren Embrey, her sister Gayle and the Embrey Family Foundation, who were inspired to give our program life—and want us to continue making a meaningful impact via such projects as *No Resting Place*.

While most Holocaust-related books depicting the camps are produced in black-and-white, this one isn't. It's in color—because the Holocaust happened in color. Thanks to the soulful photography of my colleague Sherry Aikman—longtime "den mother" to our trip-goers—you'll see the last places ever witnessed by the millions of detainees who didn't want to die there, or didn't think their nightmare would ever end.

Knowledge of troubling current and past events can engender a sense of hopelessness, but I'm heartened by the increasing number of eager minds, young and old, who are empowered by the most dangerous phrase in the English language: "I didn't know." That's indeed true for my friend and SMU colleague Denise Gee, who has dedicated herself to Holocaust studies, and creating this book, since traveling with us to Poland in 2012.

I'm proud to see all our "family" members go forth into the world as positive forces for change—and spread the universal truth our program wholeheartedly embraces: *There is no such thing as a lesser person.*

— Dr. Rick Halperin SMU '74
Embrey Human Rights Program Director
Dallas, Texas

Our "Holocaust Poland" pilgrims often recite this ancient Jewish prayer, in Hebrew and English, to honor the dead at sacred sites.

Mourner's Kaddish

(Source: ReformJudaism.org)

*Exalted and hallowed be God's great name
in the world which God created, according to plan.*

*May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime
and the life of all Israel—speedily, imminently, to which we say Amen.*

Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.

*Blessed, praised, honored, exalted, extolled, glorified, adored and lauded
be the name of the Holy Blessed One, beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing,
praise and comfort. To which we say Amen.*

*May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and all Israel,
to which we say Amen.*

*May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us and to all Israel.
To which we say Amen.*



Chapter One – complete



STUTTHOF



ONCE THROUGH THE GATE of Stutthof, "a feeling of sorrow grabbed me by the hand," says 2015 pilgrim Ogulcan Kalkanli. That emotion, plus helplessness and hopelessness, was precisely what the Nazis wanted prisoners to carry with them into the camp.

Constructed two weeks before Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Stutthof would become the Third Reich's first concentration camp in the country.

Its hulking brick administration building, the epitome of bureaucratic rigidity, ushered in the Nazis' notorious "architecture of doom"—serving as a model for the seven other camps, and hundreds of smaller ones that the Reich would operate in their newly acquired "living space."

Several years before the invasion, the Nazi special forces known as the "SS" (for "*Schutzstaffel*") began identifying exactly which "undesirables" they planned to detain once Poland was in their grips. They built the camp in secrecy to ensure its readiness for political dissidents, prisoners of war and others.

Logistically the Nazis favored Stutthof's location, 20 miles east of Gdańsk, for its prime access to transportation: The Baltic coast, Vistula River and major rail lines were as close as three miles away.



Despite their planning, German occupiers miscalculated the number of people Stutthof would need to hold. Though initially designed to house 3,500 inmates, it would ultimately hold some 57,000 people during peak operation, leading to the 10-acre site's expansion to more than 500 acres—with the population strain being alleviated by regular executions.

Any discomfort experienced by Stutthof's prisoners was seen as a positive by the Nazis, who considered the wet, marshy terrain of

northern Poland to be well suited for hastening the demise of those they deemed disposable.

Mosquitoes and intense humidity created oppressive summers. Conversely, sub-freezing temperatures caused a dense, icy fog to hover above the surface, which amplified the bone-chilling cold.

The latter is instantly understood by EHRP "Holocaust Poland" pilgrims who visit each December—and it makes an enduring impression on them.

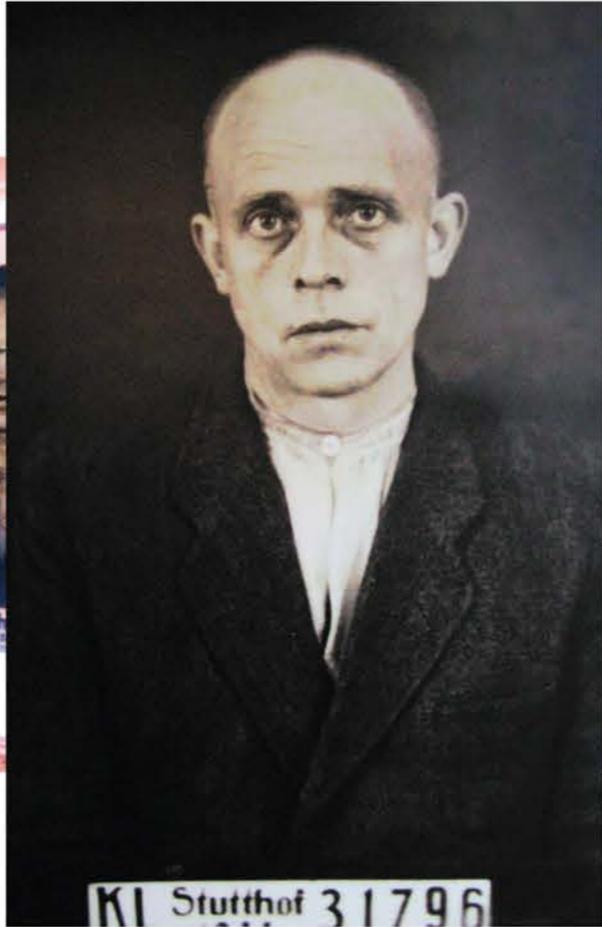
"Walking the grounds of Stutthof in my scarf, earmuffs, down-filled jacket, gloves, thermals, jeans, shirt and boots, I can't imagine only being allowed to wear a thin uniform, hat and wooden clogs," says 2013 pilgrim Patricia Lund in a SMU "Adventures" blog. >> 28

Stutthof's administration building—seen now (above) and during World War II (right) emphasized the Nazis' immense power. The adjacent "Death Gate" also aimed to make prisoners feel small.



In the first barrack at Stutthof, a massive mound of shoes lies behind a glass wall (here reflecting photographer/EHRP trip coordinator Sherry Akman, far left). As 2013 pilgrim Patricia Lund remarked at the time, "these shoes belonged to people who had a favorite joke, danced, played with friends, kissed their significant other and had dreams and goals."

In another barrack, a wooden post (left) bears the scar-like scrawls of former inmates. Some 85,000 of the camp's 110,000 prisoners would die from outright murder or from the Nazis' brutal "regime of work" that supported German naval armament and construction projects.



Ignoring the Hippocratic Oath, Nazi doctors conducted heinous medical experimentation to ensure survival of the German military in the short-term, and the Aryan race in the long-term.

One of the most haunting faces of innocent people brought to Stutthof is Prisoner No. 31796 (right). His hollow gaze transmits impending doom. The Nazis would reduce him and others to a mere number, then bone and ash.



Stutthof's brick gas chamber and nearby crematorium were built near a rail line for the sake of efficiency.



Stutthof

*I'm a man of the Earth,
So to the Earth I shall lay.*

*I know this is it,
I know this is my day.*

*Rewarded with life
If you act with compliance,
Our eyes scream out help,
But our voices remain silent.*

*Give me a number, take my name,
Take my freedom, make me a slave.*

*Harden my heart till it's black,
Black as a burning grave.*

*I knew that was it,
Knew that was my day.*

*As a man of the Earth,
In the Earth I now lay.*

— Jayce Miller, 2014 pilgrim



As disease and death ravaged Stutthof's prisoners, the Nazis built a gas chamber (far left) and crematorium to eliminate their remains (above). In such sacred spaces, EHRP coordinator Sherry Aikman is moved by the orbs of light that appear in her photographs.

"I felt ashamed to be looking at the ashes and chunks of bone on display—of people who not only deserve rest and peace, but also our respect. The anger I felt while viewing their remains is important for me to acknowledge."

— Gracyn Mix, 2011 pilgrim



Black painted stripes on surrounding trees resemble armbands of death.

Behind a mausoleum window, 2012 pilgrim Sabri Ates finds another unsettling view—victims' remains.

Exacerbating the prisoners' punishing conditions was starvation, slave labor, rampant disease and medical mistreatment that caused disfigurement and death. Prisoners also were killed by gun, rope, torture or poisonous gas.

Just reading about "the camp's history can be intense, but seeing where the Nazis' cruelty was meted out instills a much more powerful understanding of it," recalls 2013 pilgrim Jazmin Frias.

"I saw shoes from children who were brutally murdered, uniforms with blood stains, beds—if you could even call them that—where many people were piled together, transferring diseases to one another, and a place for thousands of innocent civilians to be executed. I could finally put a face to all the research I had done," she adds. "And I'm extremely distraught to know such torture occurred."

When Russian soldiers reached Stutthof on May 9, 1945—a full day after Germany's surrender to Allied Forces—only about a hundred people were found at the camp, clinging to life as living corpses (who often died within days of liberation). Meanwhile, Stutthof's tens of thousands of other inmates—anyone who could still walk, even barely—were being forced to endure a "death march" to the west—an evacuation process that claimed more than 25,000 lives.

Ultimately the world would learn of the horrors that occurred at Stutthof (including the fact that Nazis tested making soap from victims' fat). While the site isn't well publicized, it communicates a message that rings loud and clear: State power, when unchecked by the global community, can lead to the gates of a place like Stutthof.

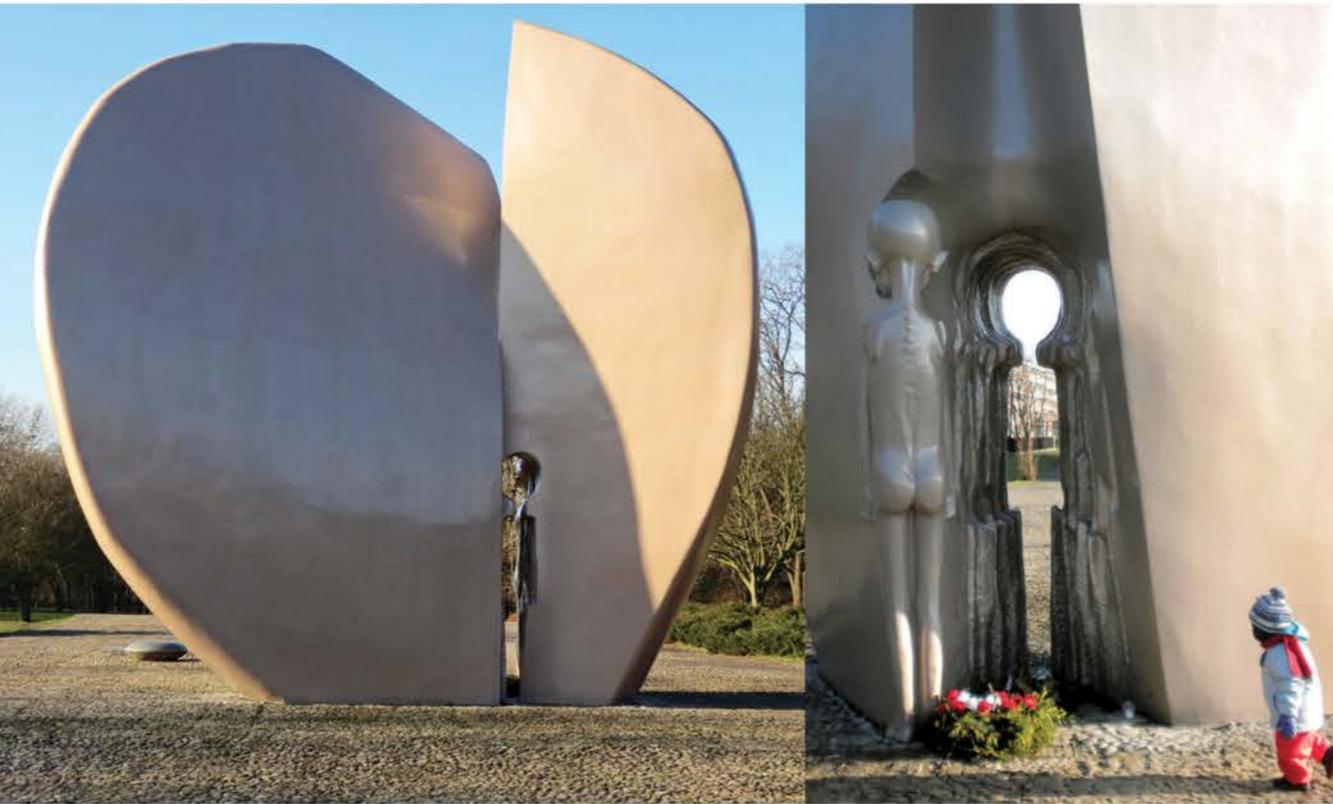


"Our guide says, 'The camps speak to us in this weather.' I agree. In the stillness I can almost hear the anguished cries of the dead," says Gracyn Mix.

Chapter Two – complete

NO RESTING PLACE HOLOCAUST POLAND





A LARGE HEART-SHAPED SCULPTURE at the Holocaust memorial in Lodz evokes a sense of peace until we recognize what's at its core: the hollow outline of a starving child. The monument symbolizes not only the human heart injured by the loss of a child, but also the painful past of this region of central Poland.

In the spring of 1940, the Reich's governing body established the Litzmannstadt Jewish Ghetto in Lodz—Poland's second largest city after Warsaw—to house slave labor within the country's key manufacturing realm.

Prime targets for forced labor were the city's 160,000 Jewish residents, who were evicted from their homes and robbed of their possessions before being jammed into a one-and-a-half-square-mile slum surrounded by barbed wire fencing and machine guns.

Living conditions within the Ghetto's jumble of dilapidated wooden buildings were beyond squalid. As many as 10 people were made to occupy each room of a building, which lacked basic plumbing and provided little to no clean water or fuel for heat.

Pervasive disease and starvation claimed the lives of more than 20 percent of Ghetto inhabitants, most forced to work 14-hour shifts in more than 100 factories that produced wartime supplies such as German army uniforms.

In December 1941, German authorities ordered the Ghetto's first mass deportation. More than 77,000 people were told they were headed for work in the east, but in reality, their destination was the death camp Chelmno, 40 miles to the northwest.

Each day at Lodz' Radegast train station, some 6,000 Ghetto inhabitants were forced into freight or cattle cars and taken to Chelmno. That number rose to 10,000 daily transports until ultimately more than 200,000 people met their deaths in the back of mobile gas vans—or by outright murder before, during or after their journey.

By August 1944, the Ghetto's remaining 70,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where all but 6,000 died shortly after arrival.

Soviet liberation of the Ghetto came within months. But on January 19, 1945, only 870 Jews were found there—alive, but barely. Nearly all of them were adults.

The Ghetto's youth—unable to provide the labor demanded of a Reich that considered them "useless"—comprised the largest number of Holocaust victims.

Contemplating the children's loss deeply affects EHRP pilgrims.

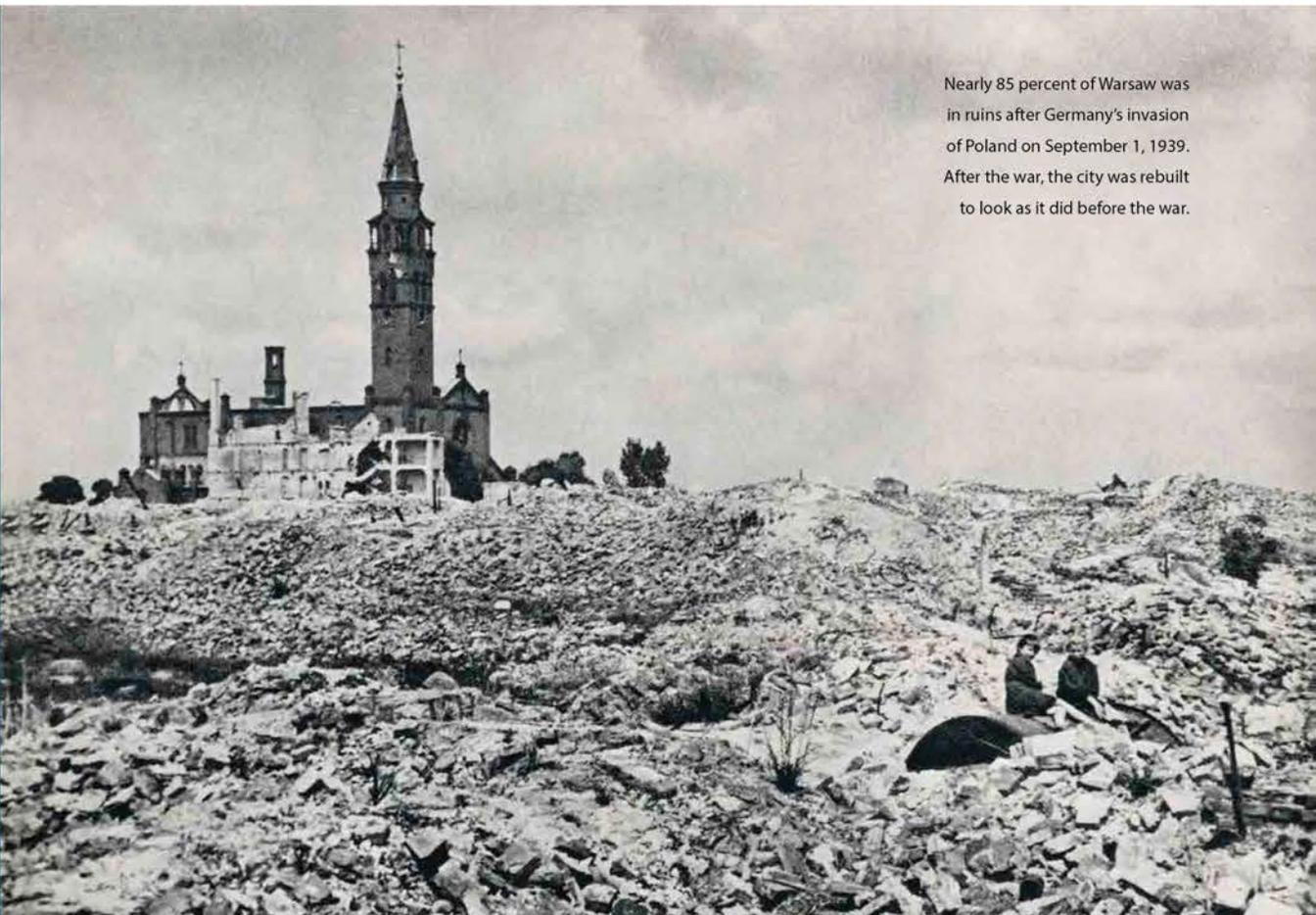
"Children were deprived of their childhood, their innocence," recalls 2013 pilgrim Maria Ruiz. "Who could they have become, and what good could they have done if their lives hadn't been cut short?"



At the Radegast train station memorial, logbooks list the names and identifying information of 233,000 people, mostly Jews, forced to live and work in the Lodz Ghetto. Pilgrim Robert Franklin was grateful to review the binders during his 2015 visit. While both his Lodz-born parents survived imprisonment, the books revealed that more than 30 other family members didn't.



Sample of pages throughout book

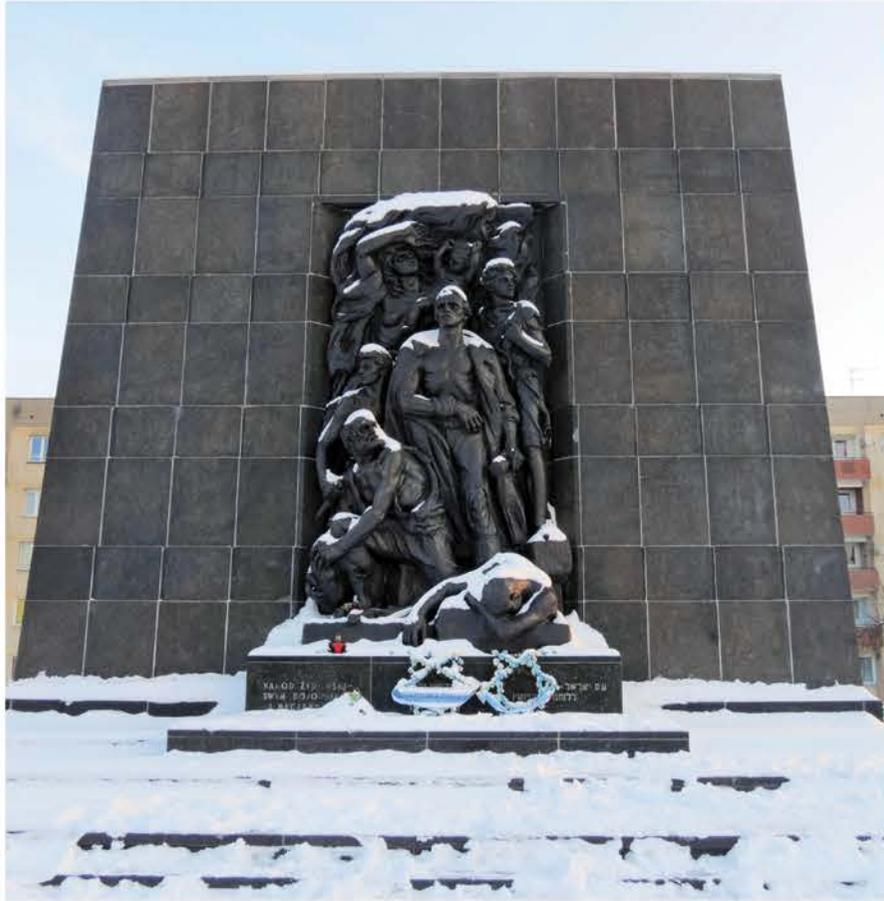


Nearly 85 percent of Warsaw was in ruins after Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. After the war, the city was rebuilt to look as it did before the war.



A cemetery memorial (*for right*) honors Polish-Jewish educator Janusz Korczak, who refused freedom in order to die at Treblinka with 200 orphans in his care. Before their departure, Korczak reportedly asked them to wear their best clothing; they were going to a special place.

The Ghetto Heroes Monument in Warsaw honors Polish resistance fighters—including one who used words as weapons. In April 1943, poet-journalist Władysław Szlengel wrote before his death in the final Ghetto Uprising, "We beg you for a violent death. But before we perish... let us, oh Lord, take good aim."



The Warsaw Jewish Cemetery has a symbolic mass grave of Ghetto victims and 200,000 headstones dating to 1809—many reclaimed from use as Nazi-era road pavers.

As a truck rumbles past on a nearby road, "I'm transported back in time, and see Chelmno as it was," DeMerritt says. "Brown dead earth lies open, and truck tires run ceaselessly back and forth, stopping only to pack the wound in the earth with pink human gauze. Drivers then return for more 'supplies.'"

For the Nazis, "This place was the first" site in Poland intended to kill on a mass scale. "Had it failed, there may have been no more like it," she says. "But it worked, this damned place of dead sky and dead grass. And they killed."

Deported to Chelmno were more than 200,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia and Luxembourg, as well as thousands of Roma or Sinti ("Gypsies") and several hundred Poles and Soviet prisoners of war.

In a manor house-reception center known as "The Castle" or "The Palace," arrivals were ordered to undress and leave their valuables for safekeeping until later departure. First, though, they would need to shower—or so they were told—before guards herded them, 50 to 70 at a time, down a ramp leading into a chamber with metal walls.

Once the doors behind them were sealed, an engine started, and soon, the dark compartment they were in jolted forward. As the driver of the gas van headed to a clearing camouflaged deep within Chelmno's surrounding forest, the confused and frightened passengers would begin to asphyxiate from poisonous carbon monoxide fumes being piped in from the engine's exhaust.

En route to the mass-grave site, the driver turned up the radio to drown out the screams and pleas of those who banged on the van's walls for mercy. Upon arrival, anyone found still alive in the back compartment was immediately shot in the head.



Polish archaeologist Zdzislaw Lorek (left) has long been the preservation hero of Chelmno's land, monuments and memory. For decades he maintained a granary-turned-museum with a poignant display of items tracing back to the Nazi death camp's opening in December 1941. Excavated finds include buttons, pottery shards and what must have been a cherished pendant.



TREBLINKA



Some 17,000 granite shards represent all the Jewish villages ("shtetls") from which Treblinka's victims originated. One marked "Ostrowiec" is especially meaningful for EHRP pilgrims. It's the small Polish town in which Mike Jacobs, late founder of the Dallas Holocaust Museum/Center for Education and Tolerance, was separated from his immediate family and forced to become a slave laborer. Jacobs later learned his immediate family, and 70 other relatives, were murdered at Treblinka.



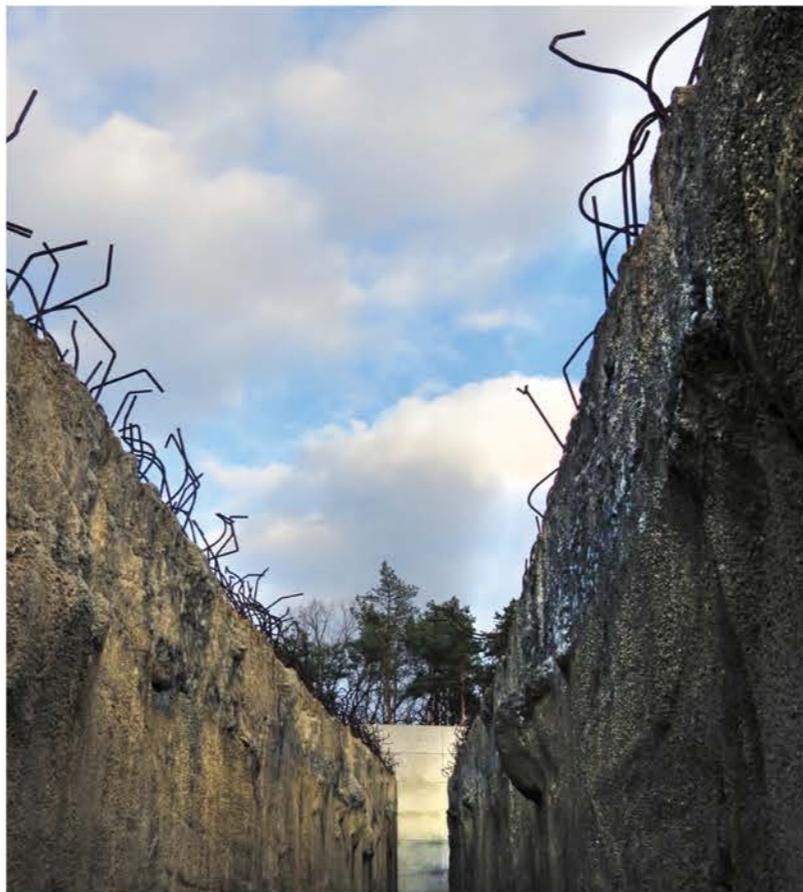
Based on Sobibor's remote location in eastern Poland, EHRP pilgrims typically arrive here in the afternoon, when December's daylight fades early. On snowy days, the setting sun casts an ethereal glow behind an immense mound of victims' ashes and crushed bone.



In warmer weather, the grim reality of what took place at this death camp is easier to visualize: The site's cremation pit-memorial is a stark, open tomb.

*"The cut and open earth
uncovers the hidden
elevation of the terrain,
revealing the dimensions
of the crime. Through
the towering height of
the walls blotting out the
sky, it evokes the terror
of one of the greatest
graves in the world...
to demonstrate the
exceptional nature and
enduring memory
of this place."*

– Belzec designers
Andrzej Solyga
Zdzislaw Pidek
Marcin Roszczyk



Belzec's mountainous memorial is embedded with the ash-and-sand remains of hundreds of thousands of camp victims, atop which rocks serve as organic grave stones. A 600-foot-long path known as die Schleuse ("the Tube"), is flanked by gently sloping cement walls evoking the victims' belittling walk to the gas chamber. Wide steps on either side of the memorial seem never-ending (far left), and above them loom trees in existence during the Holocaust.

"The last exhibit, The Prayer Room, is huge, probably 40 yards long, with walls of solid concrete and a ceiling of about 25 feet. A dim light is projected onto a quotation on a far wall as I enter, alone. The rest of the room is solid dark. My first thought is, 'This is how you feel when you're dying.' I reflect and pray. I then head to the tall, heavy steel exit door. My instinct is to pull it open, but it doesn't budge. Thinking it's a trick, I pull again without success. Finally I push, and am able to leave."

— Robert Rasberry, 2011 pilgrim



The "Prayer Room" (far left) eerily evokes the darkness and fear experienced in a gas chamber.

Rail tracks and ties used for cremation pyres (left) rise near a wall recognizing an unfinished poem by Romanian poet Don Pagis. It was discovered in a boxcar that transported nearly a million people here. While Pagis survived by being sent elsewhere, only two people managed to escape from Belzec—and live to tell about it.



"We came to a pile of bodies. As soldiers we couldn't cry, but we knelt and prayed, Jews and Christians alike."

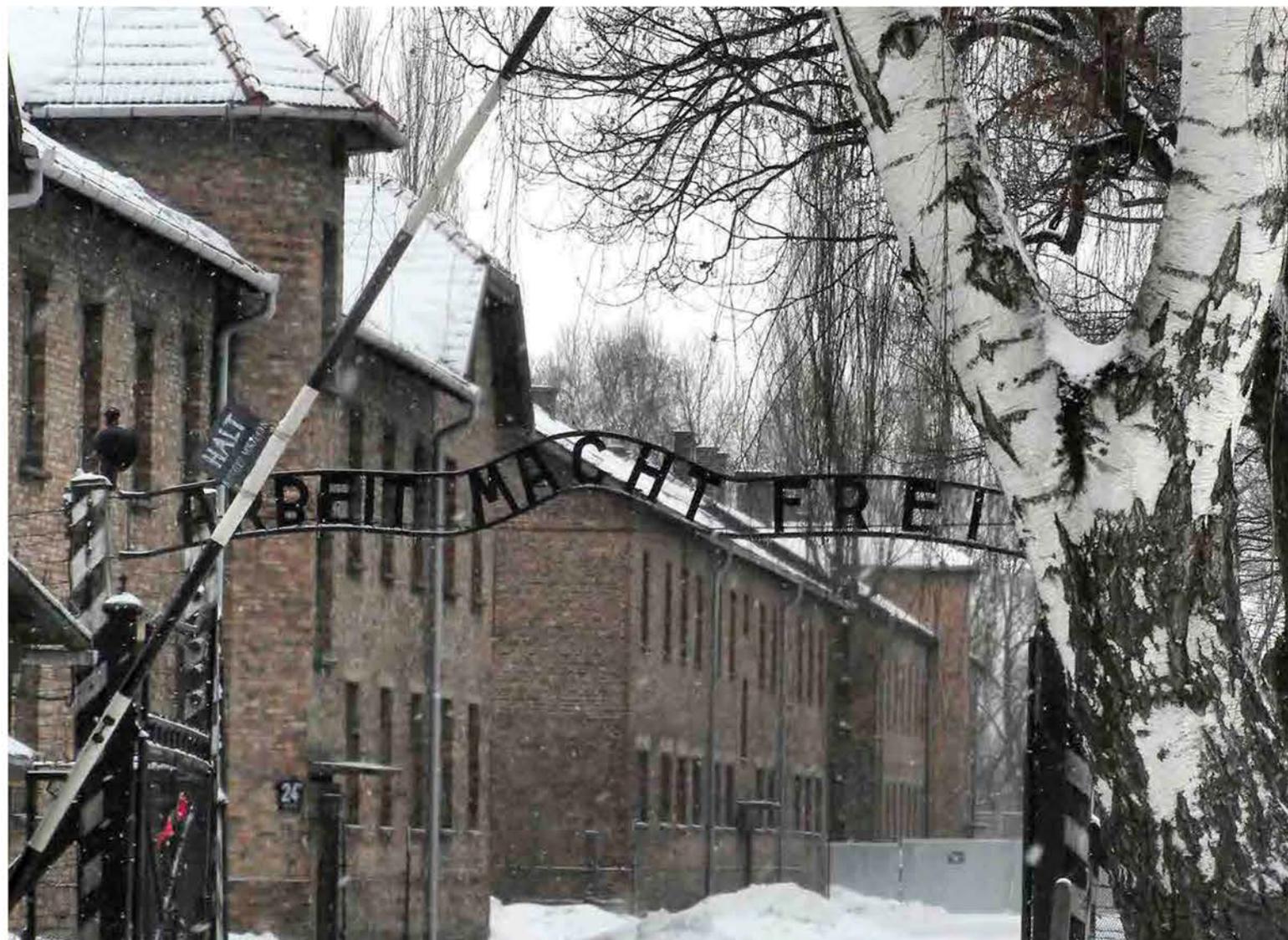
— Bernhard Storch
Holocaust survivor and former Russian soldier who spoke at SMU in 2015

Majdanek's massive domed mausoleum is disconcertingly close to a gas chamber and crematorium where the memorial's tremendous mound of bone and ash (right) was created.

"The beauty of mist and morning do not support the terror that shaped this place, or what was witnessed by those sent here to die. In the distance we see towers and church spires, each reminding us that Majdanek was no isolated island."

— The Rev. William Finnin
former SMU chaplain and 2002 pilgrim





AUSCHWITZ

A reconstructed "Death Wall"—the gray, bullet-scarred backdrop for prisoner executions—stands between Blocks 10 and 11, the former used for lethal medical experiments; the latter outfitted with savage torture chambers.



Hallways lined with prisoner photos force pilgrims to confront headlong the shaved heads and worried faces of Auschwitz's victims—along with the dates of their births, arrivals and deaths meticulously noted by the Nazis. Polish photographer and inmate Wilhelm Brasse (focus of the documentary "The Portraitist") was forced to photograph incoming prisoners as well as subjects of medical experimentation from 1940 to 1945—after which time he never took another photo. He died in 2012.



Its "success" led to the use of Zyklon B in all Auschwitz gas chambers, and ultimately in numerous other camps.

In Block 10, SS physicians, including Dr. Josef Mengele, conducted pseudo-scientific medical research focused on the "hereditary biology" of infants, twins and dwarfs. Mengele and his team also were responsible for forcibly committing castrations and sterilizations, and injecting lethal doses of carbolic acid straight into victims' hearts.

Between Auschwitz Blocks 10 and 11 was "The Death Wall," where SS guards publicly executed thousands of inmates.

Nearby was another barbaric place, where a 10-foot post had a top hook that was used for backward hanging.

With their arms tied behind their back, victims were lifted up and hung from their bound hands, causing their arms to snap at the joints. This led to agonizing deaths from immense pain and shock.

As Soviet forces closed in on the region in mid-January 1945, SS leaders began evacuating the Auschwitz camps while working to destroy evidence of their crimes.

The Nazis sent nearly 60,000 prisoners on a death march 30 miles west, where 43,000 boarded trains bound for other camps in Germany—and ultimately 15,000 would die during the ordeal.

Despite the odds, some 200,000 people managed to survive Auschwitz. Most of them were Hungarian Jews, the last groups to be deported to the camp because of continued stalling by their government.

Auschwitz's January 27, 1945, liberation date marks Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is now commemorated around the world.

While the number of visitors to Auschwitz-Birkenau is on the rise, another figure is diminishing: The number of Holocaust survivors.

For the 70th anniversary of Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2015, only 300 survivors could attend, only a quarter of the 1,500 able to visit a decade earlier.



For the 75th anniversary in 2020, "there may be almost no survivors," says Ronald Lauder, president of the Jewish World Congress, which helps fund survivors' travel.

"They are coming now because they want to bear witness—to stand there and say, 'We outlasted Hitler. We made it.'"



AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

MUSEUM HOLDINGS *(minimum totals)*

Human hair	2 tons
Shoes	80,000 pairs
Pots	12,000
Artworks	6,000
Suitcases	3,800
Striped uniforms	570
Artificial limbs	460
Items of clothing	260
Prayer shawls "tallits"	260
Eyeglasses	90 pounds

Struck with fear, those slated to be gassed often would be heard asking a nearby guard where they were headed. The response? With a wicked smile the guard would point his finger toward the billowing chimneys of the crematoria.

Once asphyxiated, the victims' inhumane treatment didn't end there. Cavities of their still-warm bodies would be searched for hidden valuables, and gold teeth or fillings yanked out with pliers.

Afterward their remains were shoved three at a time into one of five furnaces operating day and night. And when Birkenau's crematoria were full to overflowing, or not working properly, their bodies would be thrown atop gargantuan pyres.

Under SS supervision, the grim work was conducted by Jewish *Sonderkommandos* ("special units") in and around the camp's four permanent crematoria buildings labeled "II," "III," "IV" and "V"—the first being the killing chamber at Auschwitz (shown pages 133–135). And within them, as many as 20,000 bodies could be "processed" each day.

The living, or barely living, existed in the miserable conditions of Birkenau's 300-plus barracks, many of which were repurposed horse stables. During the camp's peak of operation, it held more than 90,000 prisoners—mostly Jews, but also Poles, Roma/Sinti and Soviet POWs. (By comparison the largest number of people ever detained at one time at Auschwitz was 20,000.)

Each day, inmates provided slave labor for industries supportive of the Reich (I.G. Farben, Krupp, Siemens and others) as well as nearby produce and livestock farms.

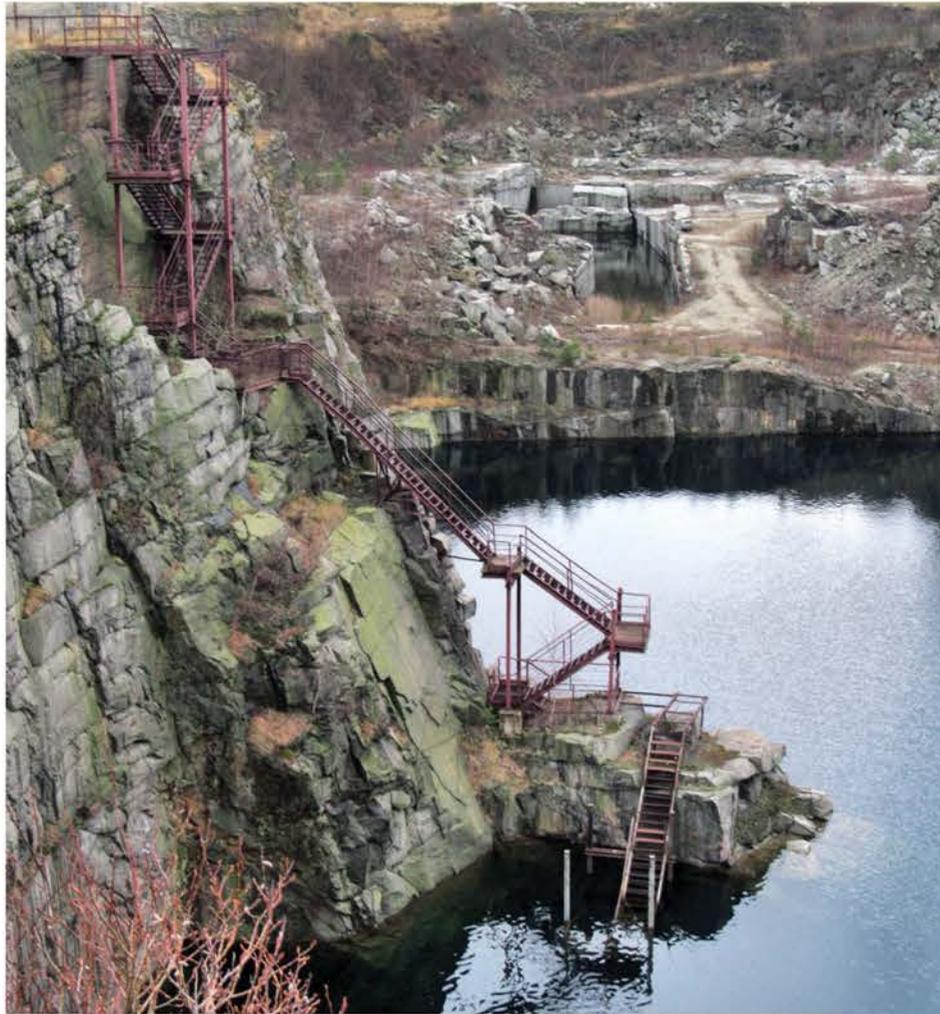


More than 300 barracks (far left) held as many as 90,000 prisoners, each transported to Birkenau in a horrifically overcrowded and underventilated "guterwagen" ("goods wagon") like this one by the camp's "Judenrampe" ("Jew ramp"). Here, transports were selected to die immediately by gas chamber, beating or bullet, or more slowly from slave labor, hunger and disease.



"We've stood in some of the harshest conditions Poland has to offer. We've connected with the pain, sorrow and immense misery of each site. None of our lives will ever be the same. And this we know: We will never forget."

— Tony Bluejacket, 2014 pilgrim



How prisoners survived such savagery is depicted in the camp's compelling works of art. Often they're paired with stories of how Gross-Rosen's inmates quietly and bravely helped keep each other alive despite the risk of torture or execution.



In the summer of 1940, Gross-Rosen was built in western Poland by political dissidents and Russian POWs forced to work at the SS-owned German Earth and Stone Works. As the camp expanded to hold increasing numbers of prisoners (76,000 by January 1945), the largest number of casualties were Jews, who were treated more harshly than other inmates at what they called a "stone hell."



Prayer for The Suffering & The Witness

Creator God, it has been said Heaven and Earth are full of Your glory. But for the past two weeks, we have journeyed across a country that was plagued by suffering; where millions of innocents, your children, were stripped of their dignity and lives. Some of us may have asked, "Where then, O God, is Your glory?"

Perhaps, God, Your glory is revealed by those who refused to be consumed by hatred and intolerance, who risked everything to alleviate suffering or to suffer alongside others.

Perhaps Your glory shines as brilliantly as the stars in the sky when we choose to love radically, with patience and kindness; to speak out against injustice. This is when Your glory is revealed.

May those who suffered here, and suffer everywhere, be wrapped in a quilt of Your peace, comfort and love. And may the things we have seen motivate us to forever be movers for justice. Amen.

—Chance Wilhite, 2016 pilgrim

CONTRIBUTORS



Lauren Embrey is president and philanthropic visionary of the Embrey Family Foundation, which in 2006 funded the ground-breaking Embrey Human Rights Program at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. // Passionate about social change, activism, education and creative expression, the Dallas native has produced documentaries on subjects ranging from the child sex trade in the U.S. to the Apollo Theater—and is currently writing her first fiction novel. // While serving on the boards of local, national and international human rights, women's health, philanthropic and creative arts groups, she and her family foundation have received numerous awards for their efforts, which recently included the "Dallas Faces Race" Initiative. // The SMU alumna earned a bachelor of arts in business administration in 1980 and master of liberal studies (with concentration in humanities and fine arts) in 2006.



Rick Halperin, co-author of *No Resting Place: Holocaust Poland*, directs the Embrey Human Rights Program at SMU, where he has taught history since 1985 and human rights since 1990. // Since 2006 he has overseen the EHRP's innovative mix of curricula, public events, community-outreach efforts and domestic and international human rights trips that began with the "Holocaust Poland" pilgrimage, now in its second decade. // The respected human rights educator and activist—a leading expert on the death penalty, genocide and torture—serves on the advisory boards of many humanitarian organizations and has won numerous awards for teaching and advocacy. // During his 46-year affiliation with Amnesty International USA, for which he has been board chair three times, he has traveled to inspect war-torn countries for the United Nations and others. // With roots in Alabama, he holds a B.A. in U.S. history from George Washington University (1971); M.A. in Southern U.S. History from SMU (1974); and Ph.D. in Southern U.S. History from Auburn University (1978).



Sherry Aikman, program coordinator for the Embrey Human Rights Program, served as chief photographer for *No Resting Place: Holocaust Poland*, which reflects the work she's produced during her 10 visits to Poland. // A professional artist with 40-plus years of experience, she joined SMU in 1987 and worked with the Women's Center for 17 years. // After pursuing a creative project in Fredericksburg, Texas, with her sisters in 2004, she returned to SMU in 2005 to work with the Office of Leadership and Community. // In 2010 she joined the EHRP, and since then has coordinated hundreds of its academic programs and engaged learning experiences. // Wife of 52 years, mother of three and grandmother of three, she has been "den mother" to countless SMU students, whom she's accompanied on more than two dozen trips. // The Victoria, Texas, native earned a bachelor of fine arts from SMU in 1996. // Her love of visual and digital arts was recently expressed in *Kaleidoscapes*, a collaboration with her computer-savvy husband, David.



Denise Gee, co-author and project coordinator for *No Resting Place: Holocaust Poland*, works with SMU Public Affairs/News & Communications. // Since joining the University in 2010, she has focused on promoting the Embrey Human Rights Program, Dedman School of Law, Tower Center for Political Studies and inspiring "world changer" students, faculty and initiatives. // After taking the "Holocaust Poland" trip in 2012, she has dedicated herself to learning more about the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity through extensive research, which has included trips to France and Germany. // The Natchez, Miss., native, who holds a B.A. in Journalism from Louisiana State University (1987), has worked as a senior editor for such magazines as *Southern Living* and *Better Homes and Gardens*, and as a reporter for several major newspapers. // This is her seventh book.

As one of only seven U.S. universities to offer a major and minor in human rights, SMU is inspiring a new generation of world changers to understand and defend the dignity of all people thanks to the Embrey Human Rights Program.

Created in 2006 after a \$1 million gift from sisters Lauren and Gayle Embrey, the innovative Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences program offers a compelling mix of curricula and public events while supporting meaningful community partnerships and student-led activism. The EHRP also leads trips across the globe to confront past or present humanitarian crises—from Rwanda and Cambodia to this country's Native American West and Deep South.



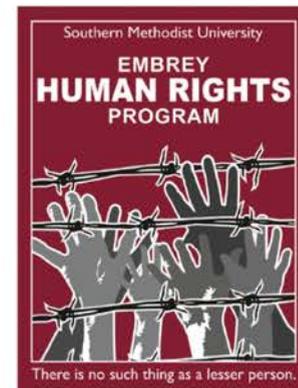
The "Holocaust Poland" trip, held each year from Dec. 18-30, is the cornerstone of EHRP travel opportunities. Since EHRP Director Rick Halperin began leading the trip for SMU in 1996, the pilgrimage has grown from only a few participants to, as of the 20th anniversary trip in 2016, more than three dozen. The life-changing experience takes people to more than a dozen concentration/death camps and memorials in Poland, where, during the Nazi occupation in World War II, nearly half of the 11 million victims of the Holocaust were murdered.

To purchase *No Resting Place: Holocaust Poland*, or to learn more about the trip, visit smu.edu/poland.

Keep in touch: Visit smu.edu/humanrights, drop by Clements Hall Room 109 at SMU, or contact 214-768-8347/humanrights@smu.edu.

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This book's historical information derives from works of print and/or digital scholarship accessed via Southern Methodist University's Central University Libraries, the Embrey Human Rights Program's special collection of reference materials, and such respected online resources as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (ushmm.org), Yad Vashem (yadvashem.org), and websites/printed materials shared by specific Holocaust sites in Poland, notably, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (en.auschwitz.org/pl/m/). Photo notes: Every effort has been made to secure permissions for historical images, and we are grateful to the people/institutions that assisted us. Permission to use the photo on Page 139 obtained from Margaret Armour; on Pages 142, 168 and back cover, from Denise Gee.



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