

This is my full diary entry about that visit to Terezin/ Theresienstadt

* I'm going to replicate precisely a day from my diary from the recent trip to Europe because it's that important---my visit to a concentration camp near Prague.

"Equally impossible to attempt to describe is my day at Terezin. You MUST however, go with a Jewish company and you MUST insist on going with a survivor. Our guide, Elishka, spent 2 years here as well as a short time in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Her life and her stories and remembrances are an integral balancing part of the (sterile and cold) experience.

The questions I end up asking....'why did this happen?' and 'how were they able to accomplish a subterfuge of such magnitude?'. Obviously these are not new questions. I'm just relating my reaction after visiting. Now, Terezin, bluntly, was only a way station in the deportation scheme. That said, 35,000 lost their lives here through disease, overwork, malnutrition and otherwise. Seeing the 4 crematorium machines is still chilling, to a degree. Hearing the litany of trainloads, designated AQ for example, with 1,000 passengers and 2 survivors (or none) is chilling. I've seen and heard much of this before, <but it is much more immediate and present when you're actually there>. Maybe when you're there, there's nowhere to run. You're also not just seeing an exhibit of a room that slept 50 people or a completely dark solitary cell. You're standing in those places.

Some of what catches my attention is incongruities (and that's mostly what I've taken my 5 pictures of)---the bucolic countryside from within the walls, a child at play on a bike outside the graveyard, advertisements for souvenirs and food in present day that eerily replicate those for shows and events during the war, young fledgling sparrows in a nest in

the loft of the barracks/hospital area. While I didn't break down and cry, I saw a lot that needs thinking about.

One of the things that has absorbed me is that the Shoah cost more than 6,000,000 lives. It cost the lives--or the part that involves living anyway---of everyone involved. The only way to be able to conscience genocide on this scale (in many instances of friends, associates, even family) is not to have one...to strip these people of their individuality, you have to deny your own. This? This was a PLAGUE of the soul and I think it took a lot of people with it. Jews, at least in this place, still against incredible odds, hung onto their souls. Those who put them here or let it happen? I don't think so. I mean, how could they?

It was helpful to have many friendly Americans and a nice Israeli couple to talk through some of what we were experiencing. We all were glad to have done this, for it is not something you can forget, especially with Elishka's amazing counterpoint. One of the most frightening things---I asked her what it felt like for her to return to Terezin, after having been deported to Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen. She was <happy> to be back. Because Terezin meant food every day. It meant someplace to sleep. Wow. I kissed her hand and thanked her very sincerely at the end. For sharing such painful experiences on a daily basis."

Mike Grammer