

Night

The Holocaust was the systematic annihilation of six million Jews during the Nazi genocide - in 1933 nine million Jews lived in the 21 countries of Europe that would be occupied by Nazi Germany during World War 2. By 1945 two out of every three European Jews had been killed.

The number of children killed by the Nazis is not fathomable and full statistics for the tragic fate of the children will never be known. Estimates range as high as 1.5 million murdered children during the Holocaust. This figure includes more than 1.2 million Jewish children, tens of thousands of Gypsy children and thousands of institutionalized handicapped children.

Plucked from their homes and stripped of their childhoods, the children had witnessed the murder of parents, siblings, and relatives. They faced starvation, illness and brutal labor, until they were consigned to the gas chambers.



The line of birch trees separating the railway lines from the gas chambers in Birkenau.

The act of writing is for me often nothing more than the secret or conscious desire to carve words on a tombstone: to the memory of a town forever vanished, to the memory of a childhood in exile, to the memory of all those I loved and who, before I could tell them I loved them, went away.

- Elie Wiesel

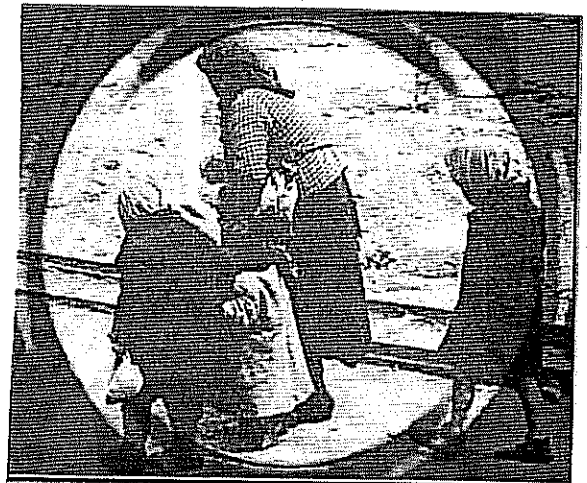


A sample of the many thousands of family photographs found in the belongings of the murdered Auschwitz victims.



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Property brought to the camp by the prisoners was systematically looted, an operation for which more than thirty warehouses were set aside in a special compound within the camp, known by the prisoners as 'Canada'. Höss's memoirs record that prisoners worked day and night to sort the booty. Freight cars were loaded every day for shipment back into the Reich - generally between five and ten, and sometimes as many as twenty - but heaps of baggage still remained to be sorted.



Auschwitz-Birkenau

KZ Dachau was the first concentration camp established in Nazi Germany - the camp was opened on March 22, 1933. The camp's first inmates were primarily political prisoners, Social Democrats, Communists, trade unionists, habitual criminals, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, beggars, vagrants, hawkers.

In the late 1930's the Nazis killed thousands of handicapped Germans by lethal injection and poisonous gas. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, mobile killing units following in the wake of the German Army began shooting massive numbers of Jews and Gypsies in open fields and ravines on the outskirts of conquered cities and towns.

Eventually the Nazis created a more secluded and organized method of killing. Extermination centers were established in occupied Poland with special apparatus especially designed for mass murder. Giant death machines.

Six such death camps existed: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Large-scale murder by gas and body disposal through cremation were conducted systematically by the Nazis and Adolf Hitler's SS men.

Victims were deported to these centers from Western Europe and from the ghettos in Eastern Europe which the Nazis had established. In addition, millions died in the ghettos and concentration camps as a result of forced labor, starvation, exposure, brutality, disease, and execution.

Auschwitz-Birkenau became the killing centre where the largest numbers of European Jews were killed. By mid 1942, mass gassing of Jews using Zyklon-B began at Auschwitz, where extermination was conducted on an industrial scale with some estimates running as high as three million persons eventually killed through gassing, starvation, disease, shooting, and burning. 9 out of 10 were Jews. In addition, Gypsies, Soviet POWs, and prisoners of all nationalities died in the gas chambers.

At Auschwitz children were often killed upon arrival. Children born in the camp were generally killed on the spot. Near the end of the war, in order to cut expenses and save gas, cost-accountant considerations led to an order to place living children directly into the ovens or throw them into open burning pits.

After WW2, in October of 1946, the Nuremberg Medical Trial began, lasting until August of 1947. Twenty-three German physicians and scientists were accused of performing vile and potentially lethal medical experiments on concentration camps inmates and other living human subjects between 1933 and 1945. Josef Mengele was not amongst the accused.

Fifteen defendants were found guilty, and eight were acquitted. Of the 15, seven were given the death penalty and eight imprisoned. Herta Oberhauser, the doctor who had rubbed crushed glass into the wounds of her subjects, received a 20 year sentence but was released in April 1952 and became a family doctor at Stocksee in Germany. Her license to practice medicine was revoked in 1958.

Rudolf Hoess was history's greatest mass murderer, the architect and SS Kommandant of the largest killing center ever created, Auschwitz, whose name has come to symbolize humanity's ultimate descent into evil. Responsible for exterminating 2,5 million people in World War II, he was a mild-mannered, happily married Catholic who enjoyed normal family life with his five children despite his view of the crematoria chimney stacks from his bedroom window.

At peak efficiency Auschwitz had the capacity to 'get rid of ten thousand people in 24 hours,' as Rudolf Hoess would testify during the War Crimes Trials after WW2. Witness after witness, document after document produced irrefutable evidence of the crimes committed, and no witness was more shocking than Rudolf Hoess, who calmly explained how he had come to exterminate 2,5 million people.

Rudolf Hoess fled at the approach of the Red Army and went into hiding in Germany under the name Franz Lang. He was arrested by Allied military police in 1946, handed over to the Polish authorities, who tried him in 1947. He was sentenced to death, and returned to Auschwitz to be hanged on the one-person gallows outside the entrance to the gas chamber.

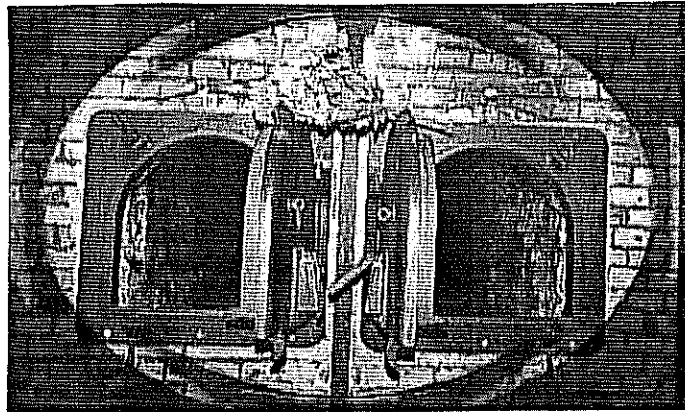
Rudolf Hoess related before his execution how he often felt weak-kneed at having to push hundreds of screaming, pleading children into the gas chambers: "I did, however, always feel ashamed of this weakness of mine after I talked to Adolf Eichmann. He explained to me that it was especially the children who have to be killed first, because where was the logic in killing a generation of older people and leaving alive a generation of young people who can be possible avengers of their parents and can constitute a new biological cell for the reemerging of this people."

Louis Bülow



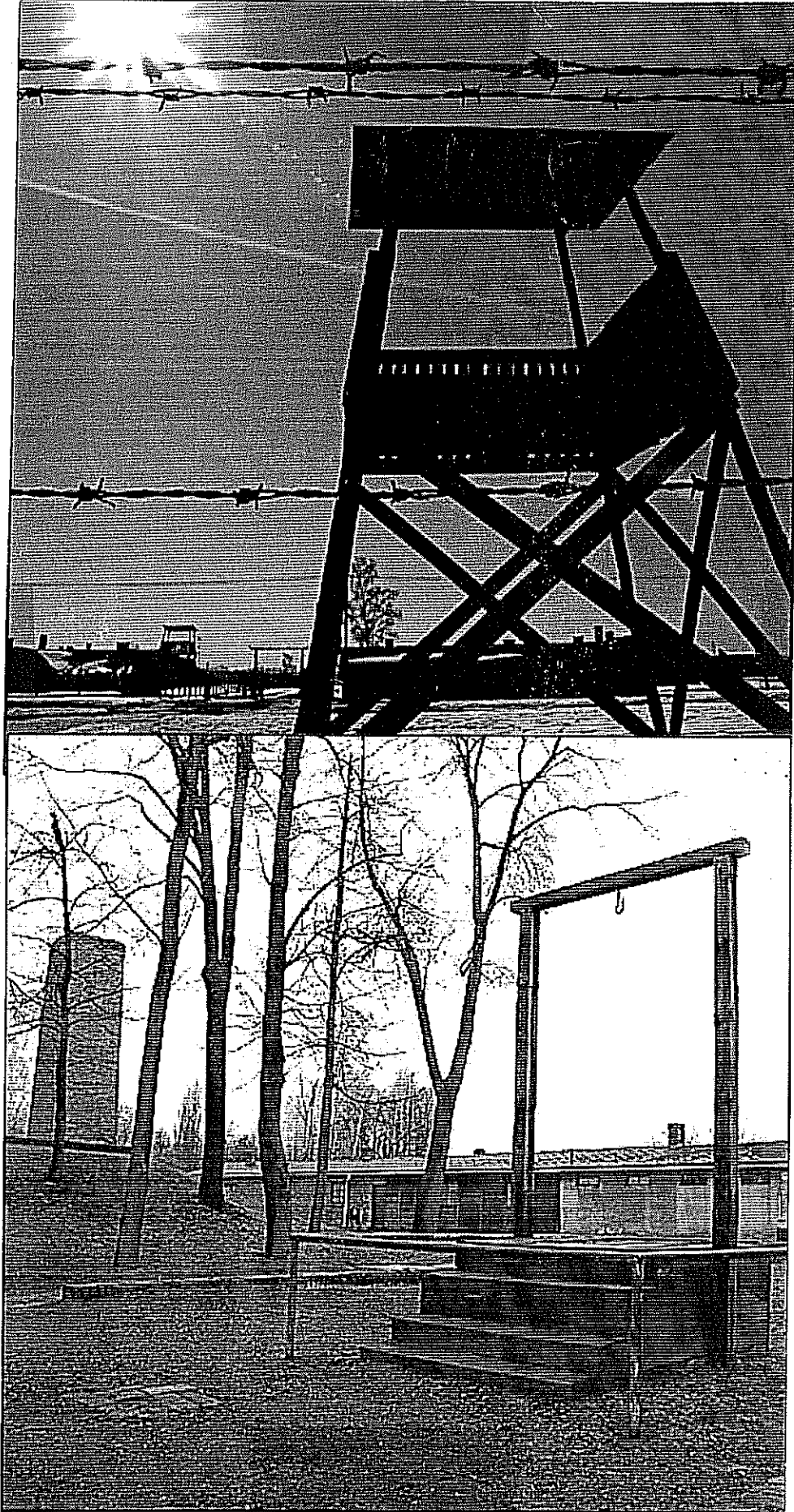
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View from the gas chamber into the incinerator room, Crematorium 1.



"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."

— Elie Wiesel



The gallows used on April 16, 1947, to hang the Commandant Rudolf Höss.

Night

By Elie Wiesel

Night is the account of a young man (Elie) who must bear responsibility for his aged father and whose loss of a beloved parent wracks his spirit with terror, despair and regret. One of the most gripping autobiographical ordeals in literature, it carries the reader into the hell of Nazi perversity to the death camps intended to rid the German Reich of its Jews.

Over eleven months—from deportation on May 16, 1944, to liberation in April 1945—Elie moves from Hungary to Kaschau, Czechoslovakia and the reception center at Birkenau, Poland. Marched east to Buna, the electrical works at Auschwitz, Poland, he witnesses the worsening of his chances of survival as the hated “Butcher of Auschwitz,” Dr. Josef Mengele, steps up the extermination of the unfit.

Timeline

- Sept. 30, 1928—Elie Wiesel is born in Sighet, Romania, which later becomes part of Hungary.
- March, 1933—Adolf Hitler is elected Chancellor of Germany; Heinrich Himmler opens Dachau, a death camp, near Munich, Germany.
- July, 1937—Buchenwald concentration camp opens.
- April, 1940—Germany captures Norway and Denmark. A concentration camp opens in Auschwitz, Poland.
- September, 1941—At Auschwitz, Germans begin using poison gas.
- March, 1943—Himmler initiates the use of crematoria in Auschwitz.
- May, 1944—The Wiesels arrive at a concentration camp in Birkenau, Poland.
- Summer, 1944—Elie and his father are sent to Auschwitz.
- January, 1945—Elie and his father are taken to Buchenwald, Germany.
- January 18, 1945—Russian forces liberate Auschwitz.
- April, 1945—American troops free inmates at Dachau and Buchenwald camps.
- 1947—Elie enters the Sorbonne to study philosophy.
- 1955—Elie is encouraged to write about his incarceration in a death camp.
- 1956—Elie enters the U.S.
- 1960—Elie publishes the English version of *Night*.
- 1986—Elie receives the Nobel Peace Prize.

People

- Elie Weisel:** the narrator and author of the novel, *Night*.
- Chlomo Wiesel:** Elie's father. They manage to stay together during their deportment.
- Moshe the Beadle:** a poor Jewish mystic in the town of Sighet who becomes Elie's spiritual mentor and friend.
- Young pipel:** a young assistant under the Dutch Oberkapo (head overseer) at Buna, he is sentenced to death for being involved in sabotage.
- Madame Schachter:** a woman of about fifty with a ten year old child. On the train ride to Auschwitz, she starts to lose her mind.
- Stein of Antwerp:** a relative of the Wiesels, he questions Elie's father about the whereabouts of his wife and two little boys.
- Juliek:** a bespectacled Polish Jew, he is a violinist in the orchestra at Buna.
- Idelk:** a crazy Kapo who beats Elie. The worst of Elie's mistreatment comes after he laughs at Idelk lying with a young Polish girl. For this, Elie is given 25 lashes and faints.
- Yossi and Tibi:** two Czech brothers whose parents are exterminated at Birkenau. They become friends with Elie at Buna.
- Rabbi Eliahou:** this rabbi's son deserts him in order to survive. Disturbed by the son's selfishness, Eli prays that he will never grow so callous toward his own father.
- Heinrich Himmler:** Hitler's second in command and the head of the S.S. He established Dachau, the first Nazi concentration camp, near Munich, Germany.
- Adolf Hitler:** dictator of Germany; a demagogue and tyrant who obtains power by appealing to the emotions and prejudices of the masses.
- Dr. Mengele:** the "Angel of Death"; a doctor who performed brutal, unnecessary experiments and operations upon prisoners.

Places

- Sighet, Hungary—Elie's home town
- Kaschau, Czechoslovakia—The first concentration camp that Elie and his father arrive at after their deportation from Sighet. It is here that they see their wife, mother, sisters and daughters for the last time.
- Auschwitz, Poland—home of a concentration camp opened in April, 1940.
- Birkenau, Poland—The Wiesels arrive in this concentration camp in May of 1944.
- Buchenwald, Germany—home of a concentration opened in July, 1937. Elie and his father are taken here in Jan., 1945.

Definitions

Torah—The primary source in the Jewish religion is the Hebrew Bible, consisting of 24 books divided up into 3 sections. The Torah includes the first five books of the Bible.

Talmud—Next in importance to the Hebrew Bible is the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of teachings of early rabbis from the 5th and 6th centuries.

Cabbala—a collection of traditional lore that probes the mysteries of the universe. Covers such subjects as angels, death, numerology, and human reasoning.

Rosh Hashanah—Marks the new year of the Jewish calendar. It is both a joyous and a solemn holiday. Jews around the world do not work or attend school on this day.

Yom Kippur—This is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. This is considered to be the day in which every individual is judged by God, and thus is a solemn day marked by prayer and repentance. No Jew attends work or school on this day.

Passover—An 8-day festival commemorating the freeing of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. A ritual feast on the first two nights of this holiday, called a Seder, includes the recounting of the Passover story. Ritual foods are eaten during these eight days which are not eaten at other times of the year. Observant Jews do not work or go to school on the first and last two days of this holiday.

Diaspora—Countries outside of Israel inhabited by Jews.

Assimilation—To accept the culture of another group while giving up one's own.

Ghetto—A section of a city in which Jews were required to live surrounded by walls.

Genocide—Coined after WWII as a direct result of how some nationalities and ethnic groups, particularly the Jews, were mistreated during the war. Its intention is the total annihilation of a race or ethnic group.

Holocaust—refers to the destruction of 6 million Jews (and 6 million non-Jews) during 1933-1945. Its Greek root means "burnt whole."

Aryan Race—The pure Germanic race, used by the Nazis to suggest a superior, non-Jewish Caucasian typified by height, blonde hair, blue eyes.

Third Reich—The Third Republic of Germany which began with Hitler's rule in 1933 and ended with his defeat in 1945.

SS—"Schutz-Staffel"—established in 1929 as Hitler's black-shirted bodyguards. They became the elite guards of the Nazis trained in brutality and put in charge of the concentration camps.

Gestapo—the secret police organized in 1933 to uncover and undermine political opposition

The Final Solution—the plan devised in 1941 to speed up the system of killing the Jews and "undesirables." This final method used an efficient system of gas chambers and crematories to kill the Jews.

Selection—A term used when the SS forced prisoners to line up for inspection and decided which prisoners would live and which would be killed.