

Entrance to Auschwitz

Being forced into a cable car with 79 other people travelling to an unknown place is not anyone's idea of a good ride. Imagine not being able to sit down, forced to use the bathroom in the corner of this crowded cable car having no privacy, and not being given food or water for multiple days. Sadly, many Jews being transported to concentration camps had died on the way, and many that survived probably wished they would die, but they kept pushing on and enduring misery because they had hope that things were going to get better. Auschwitz was a destination for many of the unsuspecting Jews, and travelling through the entrance was when the real pain began. I think it is very important that people have a basic understanding of the holocaust and what the victims went through, and after reading *Night* and doing this project, I am proud to say that my understanding of Auschwitz and the Holocaust in general is much better than it was before this class.

Before I started this project, I knew a bit about Auschwitz from reading the book *Night* in class, and as depressing as the holocaust is, I genuinely wanted to learn more about it and have a more in depth understanding. Before starting this unit in class, when I heard "holocaust" what popped into my head was pictures of the prisoners, the thought of being crammed into a cattle car, and the entrance of Auschwitz. I was aware that Auschwitz is one of the biggest symbols of the holocaust as it has so much significance; it opened in 1940 and was the biggest of the concentration and death camps. I knew it was very large and that a vast number of deaths took place there, but it didn't really sink

in until Mr. Jones showed us pictures demonstrating it's vastness, and the comparison to it being half the size of New York City. It really surprised me that it was actually like a city, a world in itself. I was aware of some extermination methods, such as gas chambers, but certainly not all of them.

When I began my research about Auschwitz, I first found out what the entrance looked like so I could construct it accurately. Then I made a list of the materials I needed to construct it, and started sketching what I wanted it to look like. One difficulty I had was having to change my list many times. I changed my mind about what I was going to use to build the building itself, what I was going to use for the base, how I wanted the landscape to look, and being confident that what I chose to build it out of would look good. Then, when I decided on all the materials I was going to use, it was difficult finding the time to go and buy them and using what little money I had to buy the materials I needed, I just kept reminding myself that if I didn't do well on this project that I wouldn't graduate, and keeping that in mind helped me to do what was necessary. I then ran into some complications while building it, such as painting a window the wrong color, or discovering the walls were different sizes. All in all however, the building of this project went smoother than I initially thought it would, mainly because I took the difficulties in stride and took time out of my day to work hard on it so progress could be made. Since I knew the basics about Auschwitz, but not any actual statistics, I needed to find out how many people died within Auschwitz, who saved the living prisoners, how big the entrance specifically was, all the different methods of extermination used within its walls. I was also wanting to know the perspective the Jews had upon entering.

While not all my questions were answered, some definitely were, and it helped me build it with a better perspective. I found out that Auschwitz is located in southern Poland, more than one million people lost their lives within its walls, and all the ways that people died, many of which being natural causes. When the Nazi Officials heard of the Soviet army approaching, they evacuated over 60,000 prisoners to various other locations and sadly many died on the way, with freedom in sight. Elie Wiesel from *Night* had a very hard time with a death march. He and many others had suffered broken limbs, lack of clothing, frigid temperatures, and were already very weak leading up to it. The only thing that kept them going was the hope of living. Elie had his dad to live for, and I doubt that he would have survived if it wasn't for his father giving him a reason to fight. One thing I wasn't aware of leading up to this project was that Auschwitz was actually a network of camps, and had different sections to it, it wasn't just one single big camp.

As I said before, the Jews were packed into cattle cars, 70 to 80 a car, and travelled for days with minimal food and water and in practically total darkness before they reached their destination. They believed that they were being transported to someplace better than what their current situation was. Unfortunately they were wrong, they had no idea where they were going or what to expect. These trains brought the poor, innocent people to Auschwitz only to be tortured more; and the entrance is symbolizing the world of hurt that these people had gone through. Upon arrival to Auschwitz, everyone was separated from most of their family members. Elie was fortunate enough to be able to stay with his father, but never saw his sister and mother again.

This project has made me much more aware of everything that had gone on in the holocaust, particularly in Auschwitz. Even though it was and is so hard to learn about, it's something that I believe everyone should have a basic understanding of. Prior to this project and reading *Night*, I only knew the basic facts of the holocaust, but never really understood how much suffering these people actually had to endure, and reading about it has made me very thankful for my circumstances, and it has honestly made my issues seem very insignificant. I don't believe I have ever been so moved and saddened by any event. It has made me look upon the human race with disdain and extreme disappointment, but I am very thankful that times are the way they are now, better than they were. Elie Wiesel from *Night* I am so thankful for, because he wrote this spectacular but heartbreaking book and has helped many people understand what him and many others had gone through. This project was very good for me to do, and I now look at the holocaust and Auschwitz with a new perspective, and hope that it never happens again.