

**Fleet Maull schreibt auf der Seite der Peacemaker-Community (14.Juni 2010):**

**June 2010 Auschwitz-Birkenau Bearing Witness Retreat**



*155 Peacemakers sitting at the "selection site" on the railway platform at Birkenau (Auschwitz II)*

Today we completed the fourth day of the Zen Peacemaker bearing witness retreat here at Auschwitz & Birkenau. This is my eighth retreat here, and I'll be back in November to help guide another bearing witness retreat for Palistinian and Jewish youth from Israel as well as youth from other countries. In past years I have written and shared daily reports, more recently in the form of blogs, each day of the retreat. This year I have not been inspired to do so up until now. Perhaps I'm just too full, having co-lead our first Peacemaker Institute bearing witness retreat in Rwanda this past April. Perhaps it is the overwhelming size of this retreat. We are 155 strong this year, participants and staff, much, much larger than usual, with the exception of the very first Auschwitz Bearing Witness Retreat in 1996. At any rate, as we sat in one of the

barracks at Birkenau this evening, barracks originally designed as stables for 50 horses that held four hundred death camp inmates, listening each other as we shared our experience, hearts and minds in council (a deep listening circle or talking stick circle), I suddenly realized that I need to share something of this retreat with all of you.



*Roshi Bernie Glassman leading a Zen Buddhist service called Gate of Sweet Nectar (Feeding the Hungry Spirits) at Crematoria I, one of five cremation sites at Birkenau (Auschwitz II) where over 1.5 million perished.*

We have followed the usual format, beginning with a deep plunge at Auschwitz I, where we watched incredibly graphic films recording the horrific truth of the Nazi genocide as the camps were liberated at the end of the war and then stepped out from the darkened theatre into the sunlit reality of the concentration camp. We toured the barracks and many exhibits with professional guides, splitting into five groups of 30. We gathered again as, 155 strong, inside the gas chamber at Auschwitz I, where we stood in silence, filling half the chamber shoulder to shoulder where 300 were gassed at one time. We proceeded to the infamous killing wall between Blocks 10 and 11. Block 11 was the SS punishment barracks where any form of resistance or misbehavior in the camps was punished to the extreme... torture, starvation, poisoning, and executions by gunfire at the killing wall. There we held our first interfaith service with Jewish, Christian and Buddhist services and the offering of candles by each participant.



*The Killing Wall between Block 10 and Block 11, the infamous SS punishment barracks.*

Then after our usual lunch of soup and bread we left for Auschwitz II – Birkenau, the massive 10 square mile death camp, where we spent that afternoon and where we would spend the rest of the retreat. I'm used to being here in November where we suffer through extreme cold, frigid winds and often snow or rain. This year instead it's the scorching sun. Poland had recently suffered very heavy rains and massive flooding, but the sun returned with a vengeance this week. We've been sitting at the infamous *selection site*, where we spend time in silent meditation and prayer and read the names of the murdered, baking under a brutally hot sun, many of us verging on the edge of heat exhaustion. This afternoon, we finally took our afternoon session into one of the barracks where we were spared the direct scorching of the sun, but not the suffocating heat. It's good to suffer here, I think; though I resist it enough. Of course we are only tasting a sliver of the suffering of those imprisoned here during the World War II Nazi holocaust.



*Chanting the names of  
the death camp victims at the selection site on the railway platform at Birkenau.*

But it was not all this, not the beautiful religious services of different faiths we held throughout the camp, not the powerful morning small group councils, or the evening programs that stirred me to write. No, it was our dear friend August who joined us tonight in the barracks for our evening vigil and large group council there.

August is a holocaust and camp survivor. He was a member of the Polish resistance arrested and sent to Auschwitz at the beginning of the Nazi occupation. On this day, April 10, 1942 he escaped along with nine others, in possibly the only successful escape attempt from Auschwitz. Twenty were captured and killed, but nine escaped and survived including August. August first joined the Peacemakers on this Auschwitz Bearing Witness retreat in 1998, and has joined us many times since. Wanting to give something back to this community, he raised the money to build the first hospice in this area with the support and co-sponsorship of the Peacemaker Community. The hospice has been operational for some time now, but will receive the final round of funding to complete all construction this Saturday. August will be 90 years old this year.

This evening with our very large group there in the barracks at Birkenau, August just sat and listened to the sharing, as one of our Polish staff quietly translated for him. After more than 90 minutes, August asked to speak, rising from his chair with help and then steadying himself to stand upright, with his single crutch. August is a large and still robust looking man for 89 years of age. He must have been a formidable presence in his younger days. August expressed deep appreciation for the Peacemakers, for the retreat and for all the heartfelt sharing he'd heard this evening. He said he was especially moved by one of Jewish participant recounting a tender moment of camaraderie and brotherhood with the German man he had been assigned as a roommate here. August spoke of the joy he feels whenever he has the chance to hug people from Germany, and the great hope that he has for healing, reconciliation a changing, evolving humanity. It's hard to convey the impact of August's words. This was not a naïve or trite expression of hope for peace and a better future, but rather the genuine inspiration and positive vision of a man who had lived through hell and seen his fellow humans at their beastly worst.

So this is what I wanted to share with all of you tonight, the inspired truth of this one old man, standing tall and shining so brightly amidst the ashes and dark horrors of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most infamous and most effective killing ground and death camp of the Nazi holocaust.



*Celebrating life with a shabbat service and meal after five days of bearing witness to death and the horrors of genocide at Auschwitz.*