

# **Temple Beth El Eastern European Trip**

## **Reflections from the Group**



### **Sue Frieden**

It is so difficult to pick one experience from this trip as the most memorable, as the trip had so many memorable experiences, not the least of which was being on a bus for many hours with so many great people!

But there was one thing we did that left me with a long-term commitment and belief. That is our attendance at services at a synagogue in Buda and our discussion with that Rabbi and his wife. It was unbelievable to feel as comfortable at their Friday night service as I do at ours at Beth El. Their service was quite similar to ours and they were so welcoming it was

hard not to feel comfortable. The Rabbi was terrific and welcoming but his wife was amazing. She was open and charismatic but her message was unforgettable and haunting. She really impacted and horrified me when she said she could see the horrible events of the 1940's happening again in Hungary.

We then went on to participate in a lovely service which emphasized that our religion and culture is universal. It made me realize more than ever before that we as Jewish people must work hard to continue our heritage and institutions. My long-term commitment is to not just leave it to others to work hard to preserve our Jewish organizations and institutions but to do my part as well. I hope if we all do that we will prevent the holocaust happening again. I know that may be naïve but at least we can try!



*German student dedicating a memorial brick to Jewish victim*

## **Susan R. Greenwald**

For Art and me, the trip was personal. Art's grandparents and aunts, Oskar, Bronia, Rikka, Doris and Charlotte Salpeter were taken from their home by the police in Dusseldorf, Germany on October 29, 1938-ten days before Kristallnacht. After being moved to several locations by the Nazis, they landed in the Tarnow district of Krakow, Poland. We know this because my mother-in-law, Claire Greenwald, left Germany to come to live with relatives in New Jersey and received letters from her family until November 21, 1941. Since Tarnow was close to Auschwitz-Berkenau, we believe they were killed there. As we rode in the bus with Rabbi, Mara and the group past the towns and farmlands that led us to Auschwitz-Berkenau, I felt the Salpeters' presence. When we entered the camp, I looked around and wondered, "Are you here? Are your spirits here? We are here for you." Our group gathered near the end of the railroad tracks that ran through this place of death and we prayed for

all the people who were murdered in the Holocaust. Art and I spoke the Salpeters' names and I thought to myself, "Hineni." We are here.

Thin threads weave through our lives. If Adolf Hitler had not risen to power, Claire would not have left Germany ahead of her family. Art would never have been born; we would not be together; our children and grandchildren would not exist.

I appreciate everything Rabbi, Mara, Yamit, Amit and the travel group did to make the trip so meaningful.



*Korczak's Orphanage in Warsaw*

## **Betsy Kempner**

Although there were many poignant moments throughout our two-week Jewish Heritage tour, our visits to the death camps had a profound impact on my experience. Over the years, I have learned about the atrocities committed during the Holocaust. I have seen video footage on TV, read books, watched movies and listened to the stories of survivors.

Yet, to be there in person for the first time, to solemnly walk the expansive, dismal grounds, feel the cold cement floors of the barracks, see the crematoriums and the empty, corroded canisters of Zyklon B, the hundreds of thousands of worn-out shoes piled high in display

cases, the lone cattle car on train tracks leading to nowhere- it was an overwhelming, emotional experience with haunting visions that will stay with me for a lifetime.

I left knowing that I am a witness to the brutal facts of this sad part of human history and I have a responsibility to share that experience. I also know the importance of never forgetting the enormous toll Hitler's Final Solution took on the Jewish people. As I took it all in, seeing the evidence of man's inhumanity to man, I realized how extremely fortunate and grateful I was to be born in a different era and to be born in America. With that, I believe it is my duty as a Jew and a person of compassion, to encourage others to visit, to bring my children to these places, and to keep this history alive and relevant.



### *At Auschwitz - Birkenau*

## Judy Aronin

As i reflect AND recall our amazingly incredible journey this summer,  
sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo  
many images AND feelings invade my consciousness!!! it is challenging to summarize  
alllllllllllllllllllllllllllllll we experienced!!!  
my first WOW is the people with whom i shared the journey!!! SOOOO0000000000000000  
WONDROUS  
to be with my Temple Beth El family to connect, to share & to be together as we traveled.  
We met amazing people during our journey ~ ~ ~ our guides,  
yamit & amit as well as special guides in each city we visited!!! AND ~ ~ people  
we met along the way ~ ~ ~ for me, an amazing group of Italian students coming  
here to America for their 10 month study abroad program ~ ~ ~ bright, eager,  
engaging AND a joy to meet!!!  
The wonder of being out in the world, AND to meet remarkable people ~ ~ ~  
all pursuing productive, creative paths!!!!  
Sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo



incredible to embrace, AND to know there is an enormous world beyond my little corner, filled with extraordinary people! We visited three different concentration // death camps ~ ~ ~ each with a different feel. It is one experience to see a movie, to read a book about the holocaust ~ ~ ~ it is beyond words to explain how it feels to actually BE in the spaces where our people walked and lived and died ~ ~ powerful and profound beyond words.

Berlin is a vibrant city ~ ~ ~ pulsing with activity!!! We found the people in Berlin to be sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo open about the holocaust, Germany's role AND responsibility AND coming to terms with this history. This includes our remarkable guide in Berlin, as well as people we met in the shops, in the hotel, in the school we visited, AND everywhere we went!

[illegible]

### *Shabbat dinner in Budapest at a Matzah Themed Restaurant*

## Gary Lessen

When all is said and done, the one thing that overwhelms my thoughts about what we saw and experienced is how fortunate we are. How fortunate we are to live in the US of

A. People have told me that my whole life. I truly have a much better understanding of what that means. And, there's two experiences from the trip that drive that home to me every single day: The first is this: There are STILL, 70 years later, Jews who live in these countries that do not want to be a member of, or associated with any kind of Jewish organization, including a synagogue for one simple reason: They do not want their names on any kind of list that would make what happened before easier to happen again. How different that is from our experience. We are proud to be associated with any Jewish organization we choose to affiliate with, and bring on anyone outside the Jewish community who wants to challenge that. How different our lives would be if we were AFRAID to have our names associated with TBE because we feared for our well-being, or even our lives.

The second is that synagogue that was built within the walls of an apartment building (like in the atrium in the Hyatt Regency in Greenwich). Consider having to shield the very walls of our place of worship from the outside world because of fear of retribution, just because we are Jews. What a different world we live in.



*Secret Prayer Room in Terezin*

## **Sari Jaffe**

I had already been to all the cities that the TBE Jewish Heritage Trip was covering. In 1986, I travelled to Poland with my father, a survivor of the concentration camps, to participate in Eric Strom's Bar Mitzvah in Krakow and visited Warsaw and Auschwitz with the group. In 2010 I accompanied my father's cousin, also a survivor, when he returned to his hometown and Auschwitz. Alan and I had been to Prague and Budapest about 10 years ago and since then I had returned to Budapest with Sue Frieden and Devra. I had been to Berlin with Devra in 2010. So, I was not expecting this trip to be much of an eye opener for me.

There were, however, more than a few experiences that were particularly meaningful to me personally.

1. In Budapest, our group was taken to the Frankel Leo Street synagogue which dates back to 1888. In 1928, it was completely surrounded by an apartment building built around it so that currently the synagogue is not visible from the street. During World War II the synagogue was used as a stable. Rabbi Vero and his wife Linda are a remarkable couple. They have 3 children. The oldest, a girl, is 14, the same age as my granddaughter Zoe and like Zoe, she is active in Bnai Brith Youth Organization and attends a Jewish summer day camp. The Rabbi's wife, who did most of the talking, explained to us the many difficulties of being Jewish in Hungary at this time. The main question on my mind was why they chose to remain in Hungary and raise their children in such an anti-Semitic atmosphere. (I was thinking about my maternal grandfather, Max Riesel, who was a Rabbi in the 1920's in Hungary/Romania who brought his family to the USA in 1933 so that his 4 children could have a better future. ) The Rabbi and his wife felt that they had an important role in the Jewish community in Hungary and made it their life's mission. Devra and I were sitting in a row by ourselves, and I was looking at the many plaques on the wall at the end of our row. I was amazed to see a large plaque in memory of a family named Riesel (written in Yiddish). I used this to later ask the Rabbi's wife privately if there were any Riesels still in the congregation. She told me that there were none, but she would look into it for me. While I had her attention, I asked her again about her family's future in Hungary. She told me that she wanted her children eventually to attend college either in Israel or the United States and asked if my granddaughter could possibly be in touch with her daughter. The Friday night service was not so different from what we experience at TBE and when Rabbi Hammerman chanted the closing prayer, the congregation, Hungarians and Americans, sang together with a lot of ruach (spirit). Challah and wine were served after the service. The wine was typically Hungarian - tokay - and delicious. The whole experience at the Frankel Leo Street synagogue was just wonderful.

2. Our group spent a morning in Terezin, a transit camp outside of Prague. Alan and I had been there before, so I did not think I would see anything new. What I did not know was that a hidden synagogue had been uncovered in Terezin. It had been flooded and therefore inaccessible when we had previously visited Terezin. This tiny synagogue expressed the hopes of those Jews for a future. On the ceiling were many stars and one large painted Jewish star. Stenciled on the walls were messages such as "and our eyes will witness Your compassionate return to Zion". I still get emotional when I recall being inside it.

3. On our way to Berlin, we stopped for lunch in Dresden and had the chance to visit a recently built beautiful contemporary synagogue. A Russian immigrant very proudly took us on a tour. We asked her about the congregation and she told us that they were almost all seniors and that there were no activities for children. We left wondering about the future of the congregation and the future for Jews in Germany outside of Berlin.

4. In Krakow we visited the Galicia Jewish Museum. There was a special exhibit about a diary written by a young girl from Lodz at Auschwitz, Rywka Lipszyc, 14 years old. There is very little known about this girl and there is a question about whether she actually survived the war and what happened to her. Reading some of the pages of her diary were heartbreaking. She wondered if she would ever be a mother, if she would ever see any of her family again, etc. I could not stop shaking as I read and cried for her.

5. At the Galicia Jewish Museum we met and heard from an older woman whose family was responsible for saving the life a young Jewish girl in Poland during the war. She spoke to us in Polish and had a translator next to her which made it a little awkward to hear the story. I had never actually met anyone who had received the designation of "Righteous Among the Nations" from Yad Vashem. She described in detail the circumstances of her family's valiant and successful efforts. I wondered if I would have had the courage to do what they did, including putting my own family's life at risk to save someone I did not know beforehand. We all stood up and applauded at the end of her presentation. I would have loved to hug her and thank her personally but did not have the opportunity. What a contrast to the other Poles that we met, who claimed that they were victims just as much as the Jews were.



*Berlin Olympic Stadium*

## **Alan Jaffe**

I decided to participate in the TBE Jewish Heritage Trip, generally, to learn more about our history, both positive and negative, and to see where it all happened. But, more specifically, I wanted to see Auschwitz, from which my father-in-law, Edward Blonder, emerged as a survivor.

For me there were three highlights of the trip.



1. We attended a Friday night service at a synagogue in Budapest. While it was a very enjoyable service, it was also sad in that the rabbi and his wife (who spoke to us before the service) are fighting, what seems to be, an insurmountable battle to keep Judaism alive there.

2. In Berlin we visited various museums and exhibits. It was obvious that the German people were not trying to whitewash what Hitler did there. They openly showed how he came to power and what the result was, especially to the Jews.

3. When we visited Auschwitz and got a small glimpse of the horrors which occurred, it was hard to believe that my father-in-law not only survived, but also lived the rest of his life as a kind and loving person, one of the nicest people I have known.

In light of what is going on in our country today, the trip made me feel, even more than before, that “we can never forget” what happened there.



*Slovakian Countryside*

## **Stephanie Goldpin**

I was most disturbed by the magnitude and pervasiveness of the collusion of so many people of different faiths, education level and cultures. Where did all this hate and capacity of inhumanity come from. I went on this trip to try to understand the reason for such hatred and determination to destroy and torture Jewish people. I still can't understand or fathom this. I looked beyond the fences of the concentration camps, ghettos and saw ordinary people who would have been able to see and hear that chose to ignore, assist, and even escalate the attempted destruction of a people. Most all the guides we spoke to blamed the Nazis and no one seemed to take responsibility for the vast numbers of ordinary people that allowed the Holocaust to happen. It should be louder and more visible in their collective conscience and they should own their past in this history.

## **Eileen Rosner**

I have always been proud of the fact that I am 2<sup>nd</sup> generation American on one side and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation on the other side. Although I knew the names of the countries my family came from, I had no real connection to them. And then as we were landing in Poland, I heard the

name of my grandmother's home town-not a small country farm place but a city with an airport. I saw the name on signs in the airport.

I realized that I am Polish too and Hungarian and German. As we wandered the streets of the cities on our journey, I wondered if my family had walked those streets more than 100 years ago. This was my very personal experience on this trip.

I realized how lucky all of us were to have been born when and where we were and it was just luck. The people of the United States have not experienced being taken over by neighboring governments. We have not lived in fear about expressing our opinions, about not making waves, about who was listening to what we say or write. We are so very lucky.

I learned about the extent of the Final Solution, how the streets and cities had their names changed, how their culture was to be eliminated, how all traces of the people were to be destroyed. Nothing was left but the hair and the ashes.

I saw so many different kinds of memorials. The ones that stick in my mind are the empty chairs in Krakow, the stumble stones in Berlin, the wall constructed by the school children on the grounds of a synagogue that was destroyed in a Berlin neighborhood, and the camps.

So I came away with a recognition of my personal background, of the evil that is possible if we do nothing and how very lucky we are to live when and where we do. And gratitude for how supportive the members of the TBE community with whom I traveled were.





*Jews are excluded from civic choirs. 1933*



*German movies are only those movies created in Germany, by those of German descent. June 28, 1933*

*Jewish art and antiques dealers are no longer allowed to work in their profession. They have to liquidate their store within four weeks. 1935*



*Jews are no longer allowed to join the German Automobile Association. October 1, 1933*

*Jewish actors and actresses are no longer allowed to perform. March 4, 1934*





**Jews may no longer work as independent craftsmen.**  
November 12, 1938



**Aryan and non-Aryan children are not allowed to play together.**  
1938



**Jewish authors are forbidden from all literary activities in Germany.**  
March 1939



**Baths and swimming pools in Berlin are closed to Jews.**  
December 3, 1938



**Jews are not permitted to leave their apartments after 8 p.m. (9 p.m. during the summer).**  
September 1, 1938



**Attendance at cinemas, theaters, opera houses, and concert halls is forbidden for Jews.**  
November 12, 1938

## PLACES OF REMEMBRANCE



**Jews are permitted to use public transportation only by 10 p.m.**  
September 1, 1938  
**Complete ban**  
April 16, 1940  
**Use of public transport is forbidden for Jews.**  
June 16, 1940



**Cigarettes and cigars are no longer sold to Jews.**  
June 11, 1942



**Jewish children are expelled from public schools. Prohibition of all school attendance.**  
November 15, 1938  
June 10, 1942



**Jews must declare their assets and property to the German economy.**  
June 16, 1938



**Jews no longer receive ration cards for clothing.**  
December 1938  
**Confiscation of fur and wool clothing.**  
January 1942



**Jews may no longer purchase meat, meat products, or other rationed foods.**  
September 16, 1942



**Jews may not use public transportation during peak travel hours. They may only sit when other travelers have been seated.**  
September 12, 1943



**At Bayerischer Platz, Jews may sit only on yellow park benches.**  
December 1939



**Only films which have been created in Germany and by German citizens, and are acknowledged as a German film.**  
June 10, 1937



**First mass deportations of Berlin Jews.**  
October 18, 1941  
**First deportations directly to the death camp at Auschwitz.**  
June 16, 1942



**Citizens of German descent and Jews who marry members of the German race must be registered.**  
August 1, 1937  
**All valid mixed marriages are null and void.**  
September 1, 1937



**Jews may not use public libraries.**  
August 1, 1942  
**Jews may not purchase books.**  
October 1, 1942



**Jews may only use public transportation if their place of work is more than six kilometers from their home.**  
March 1, 1942



**Jews in Berlin are food allowed to buy food between four and five o'clock in the afternoon.**  
July 4, 1940



**All local government offices in Berlin must immediately suspend Jewish teachers in public schools.**  
April 1, 1933



**Wannsee Conference, Berlin, October 9, 1941**

The Wannsee Conference was held on October 9, 1941, at the villa of Hermann Goerdeler on the Wannsee lake. It was attended by high-ranking officials of the Nazi regime, including Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, and Joseph Goebbels. The conference was a key event in the planning of the 'Final Solution' for the Jews of Europe.

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**Senior Jewish employees can be fired without notice or compensation.**  
November 12, 1938



**Cornish pasties of Berlin are rationed for Jews.**  
December 3, 1941



**In bakeries and confectioneries, signs must be posted stating that Jews and Poles may not purchase cakes.**  
February 14, 1942



**Costs for treatment by a Jewish doctor after April 1, 1933 will not be borne by the Reich. The costs of Berlin's public health insurance companies.**  
June 1, 1940



**Jews are excluded from sports groups.**  
April 25, 1933



**All Jews must adopt the names of 'Jugend' for men and 'Jugend' for women as additional first names.**  
April 1, 1938



**Jews are not permitted to join the newly-founded 'Jugend' Club, Automobile Club.**  
October 1, 1937



**Jewish doctors may no longer practice.**  
July 25, 1938



**The subjects 'Ghetto History' and 'Ghetto' are examination fields at all schools.**  
September 1, 1938



**Jewish lawyers and notaries may no longer have legal representation concerning the City of Berlin.**  
June 1, 1937



**Employment ban for Jewish actors and actresses.**  
March 1, 1934



**Jewelry and other valuables may not be taken out of the country by emigrants.**  
January 1, 1939



**Screened after Jews are to be removed from the development of the 'Quartier' will be removed from the 'Quartier'.**  
July 1, 1939



**Racial agreements with Jews can be terminated without notice and without keeping any of their children, so-called 'Jew House'.**  
April 1, 1940



**All local government offices in Berlin must immediately suspend Jewish teachers in public schools.**  
April 1, 1933

**Radios are confiscated from Jews.**  
September 21, 1939

**Persons belonging to Jews must be marked with the letter 'J'.**  
September 1, 1938

**Jewish civil servants may no longer serve the State.**  
April 1, 1933

**All files dealing with anti-Semitic activities are to be destroyed.**  
February 16, 1940