

**"FOR THE
DEAD AND
THE
LIVING, WE
MUST
BEAR
WITNESS."**

**—ELIE
WIESEL**

**Becoming a
Witness
By: Jessica
Posnock**



FEAR.

HOPELESSNES.

DISGUST.

SADNESS.

DESPAIR.

HATRED.

GRIEF.

ANGER.



I took this picture here, at this gate, where my ancestors walked in, unaware of their fate and imminent death.

I saw
Auschwitz
with my
own eyes.

I
became
a
witness.

Going to the different concentration camps, I
had no idea what to expect.

Yes, this was going to be one of the ugliest and
darkest places I would ever be throughout my
entire life.

I didn't know how I was supposed to feel
and what type of reaction I would have.
Would I cry? Would I be silent?

The minute I stepped into Auschwitz with
"Arbeit Mach Frei" above my head,
everything felt surreal.

I felt like this was straight out of a
movie.

I looked around me and saw green
grass everywhere.

Green grass with flowers coming out of
the ground. Why was that?

I was standing in one of the ugliest places
in the world. How was there green grass
and flowers surrounding me?

I felt disgusted.

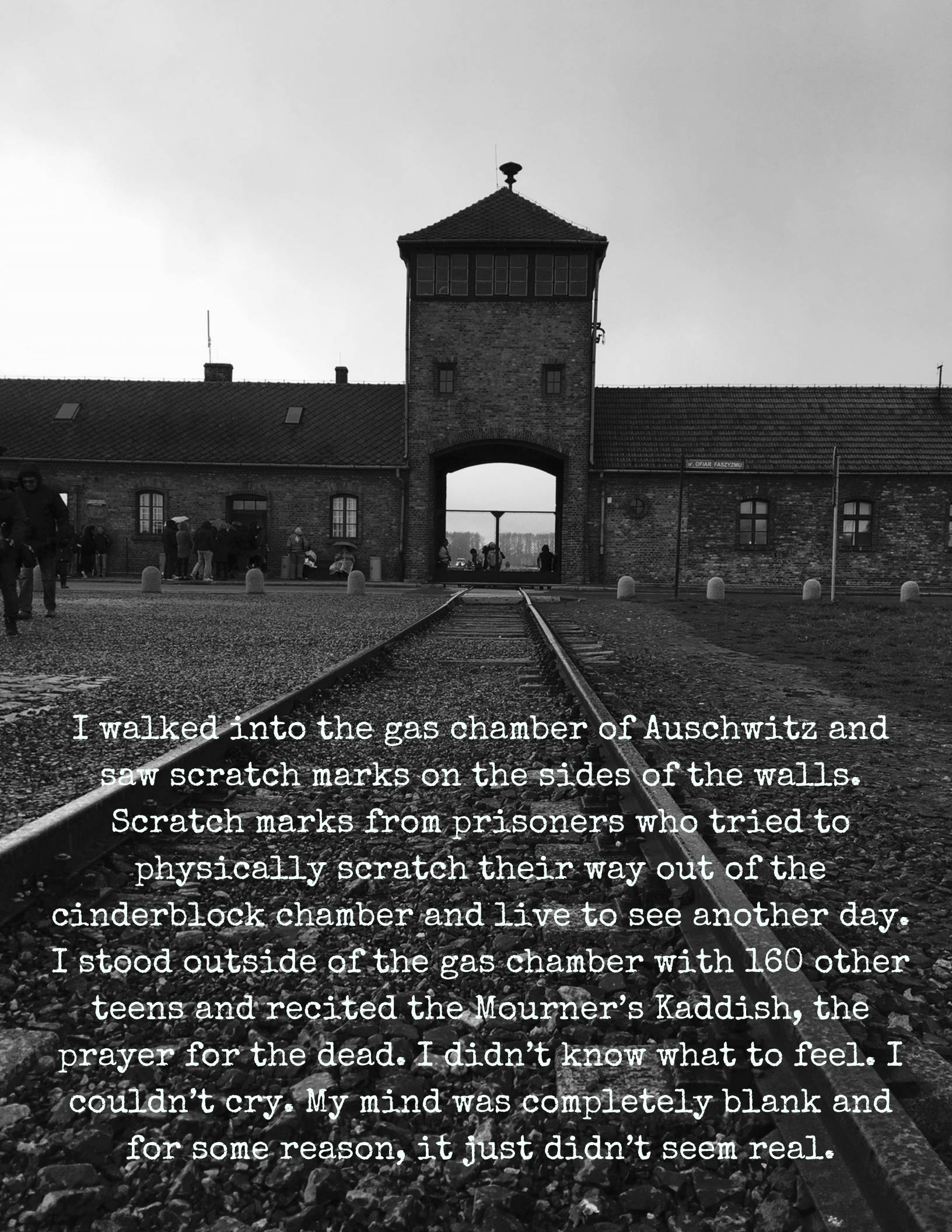
How could people allow this place to look
nicer than it had when my ancestors died
there?

I felt relief.

Maybe there were some days
when people would wake up and think it
was going to be an easier day.

But at the same time, I didn't know
what to feel.

I felt numb.



I walked into the gas chamber of Auschwitz and saw scratch marks on the sides of the walls. Scratch marks from prisoners who tried to physically scratch their way out of the cinderblock chamber and live to see another day. I stood outside of the gas chamber with 160 other teens and recited the Mourner's Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. I didn't know what to feel. I couldn't cry. My mind was completely blank and for some reason, it just didn't seem real.

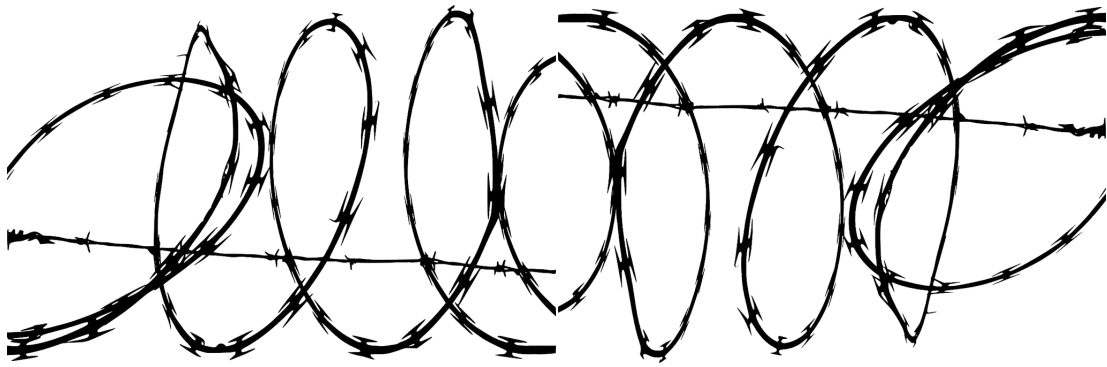
Majdanek.



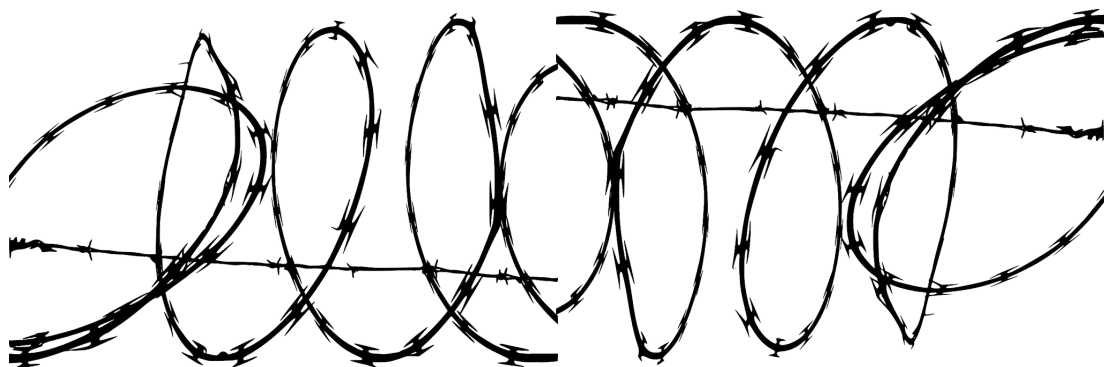


Majdanek was the first concentration camp liberated by the Russian army, so the Germans had no time to destroy any of it. The Zyklon B tie-dyed on the walls, the shower heads perfectly aligned on the ceiling. The once barren ditches, now fertile and the thousands of shoes of the prisoners. The camp could be up and running again in less than 48 hours. Majdanek was the third out of four concentration camps we visited. I had seen Auschwitz and Birkenau, and thought I would be prepared for what I was about to see at Majdanek.





I'd seen the crematorium and gas chambers in Auschwitz, but it didn't hit me until I saw them in Majdanek. I stepped into the crematorium and saw giant ovens that were stuffed with four or five dead bodies at a time. I had no reaction. I stood against the wall silent. Then it hit me. My ancestors, my innocent ancestors were murdered and shoved into these ovens completely against their will. They were tormented and beaten for the simple reason that they were Jewish. I started bawling. I couldn't control myself. One of my friends came over to me to give me a hug and started bawling. She started reciting the Mourner's Kaddish, but I couldn't speak. Tears were streaming down my face and I couldn't even take a breath to say a prayer for the dead. I walked outside the crematorium and looked around at the weird landscape. The beautiful grass, a city right over the hill. Finally, I was able to catch my breath and say the Mourner's Kaddish for my ancestors. And in this moment, never before had it felt so real.



There is a memorial at
Majdanek. The first part of
the memorial is a large
rock and the second part is
at the other side of the
camp. Before leaving, I
went to see the second part
of the memorial. No one in
my life could have
prepared me for what would
be there when I walked up
the steps to the memorial.

The ashes of
60,000
people.
Jewish
people. My
people. My
ancestors.



Happiness.

Passion.

Excitement.

Appreciation.

Hope.

Anticipation.

Pride.

Joy.

Love.

Enthusiasm.

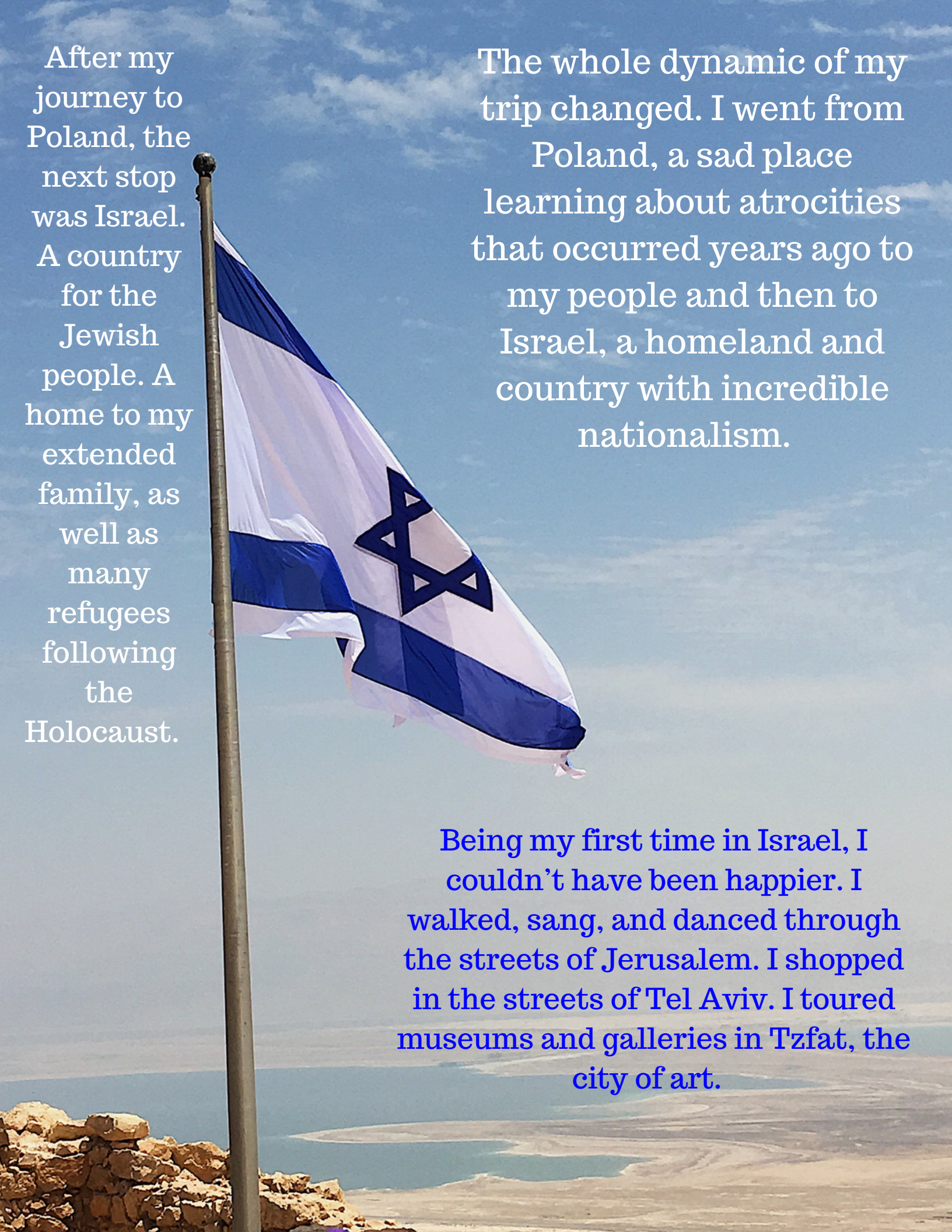


**"I marvel at the resilience of the Jewish people. Their best characteristic is their desire to remember. No other people has such an obsession with memory."
-Elie Wiesel**

After my journey to Poland, the next stop was Israel. A country for the Jewish people. A home to my extended family, as well as many refugees following the Holocaust.

The whole dynamic of my trip changed. I went from Poland, a sad place learning about atrocities that occurred years ago to my people and then to Israel, a homeland and country with incredible nationalism.

Being my first time in Israel, I couldn't have been happier. I walked, sang, and danced through the streets of Jerusalem. I shopped in the streets of Tel Aviv. I toured museums and galleries in Tzfat, the city of art.



ON YOM HAZIKARON, ISRAELI MEMORIAL DAY, I SPENT THE DAY IN TEL AVIV. IN ISRAEL, A SIREN GOES OFF AT 11AM FOR TWO MINUTES STRAIGHT, ACROSS THE ENTIRE COUNTRY. IT IS A TWO-MINUTE SILENCE TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES FIGHTING FOR THEIR BELOVED COUNTRY. I WITNESSED THIS ALARM AND THE WHOLE WORLD STOP. AT 11AM, I WAS STANDING ON THE STREET CORNER OF ONE OF THE BUSIEST STREETS IN TEL AVIV. WHEN THE SIREN WENT OFF, I WITNESSED EVERY CAR AND BIKER ON THE ROAD STOP AND GET OUT OF THEIR VEHICLE. EVERYONE ON A BUS STOOD UP IN SILENCE TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAD FALLEN.



IN THIS MOMENT, I FELT NOTHING BUT PRIDE AND AMAZEMENT FOR ISRAEL. EVERY SINGLE PERSON STOOD STILL AND SILENT TO REMEMBER VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND WAR. THIS MOMENT MADE ME FEEL EXTREMELY SUPPORTED AND IMPORTANT BY BOTH MY FRIENDS AND THE CITIZENS OF ISRAEL.



THE NEXT DAY WAS YOM HAATZMAUT, ISRAELI INDEPENDENCE DAY. ON THIS DAY, I MARCHED THROUGH THE CITY OF JERUSALEM TO THE KOTEL, THE HOLIEST SPOT IN THE WORLD, SINGING ISRAELI SONGS AND CELEBRATING FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE. I WAVED AN ISRAELI FLAG HIGH UP IN THE AIR AND DANCED THROUGH THE STREETS, PROCLAIMING MY LOVE FOR ISRAEL AND THE INDEPENDENCE IT WAS GIVEN. IN THIS MOMENT, I WAS OVERJOYED AND FULL OF PRIDE.





The Hebrew word in the picture above is Tzedakah, which means charity. In Judaism, tzedakah can be given in many ways, and is cherished throughout society. My tzedakah will be to teach younger generations about my experiences throughout the March of the Living, and how they greatly impacted my life. I saw the horrors with my own eyes, but this trip changed me for the better.

Although it was emotionally draining and challenging, visiting Auschwitz, Birkenau, Majdanek and Treblinka was essential to my identity as a Jew and as a witness. After this journey, I realized how necessary it is for people to see the tragedies that occurred and for me to speak about what I saw for generations to come. Soon, survivors won't be around, and it will be my responsibility to educate others about the atrocities to the Jewish people. I am now a witness.



Emotion is what makes up our lives and identities. If we didn't show emotion, we wouldn't be humans. It is a way we communicate with others and express ourselves. Although my emotional experiences were different, one aspect of my emotion stayed the same. I cried I cried in the gas chambers of Majdanek and cried on the streets of Jerusalem. Emotion challenged me throughout my journey and ultimately led me to finding out more about my identity. My identity as a witness.