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Boarding a train is not a particularly chilling event. You never question whether the train will deliver you to your destination or that it might follow a very ominous, winding track to an uncertain location instead. You simply assume that within an hour or two you will be reunited with an old friend on a platform in your home town. As I boarded the train for Poland aware of the destination I was headed, I was negligent as to how such a place as Auschwitz would change me.

It's nothing like the pictures. There are trees all around, shops and gas stations, a few small homes even line the street leading up to the camp gate. The narrow, unforgiving prison cells, walking through the only still standing crematoria left, and staring dumbfounded at a reconstructed shooting wall in the courtyard of a prison block, contributed only slightly to my metamorphosis.

Almost everything at Auschwitz-Birkenau was destroyed. Field and forest cover an ocean of barrack and crematoria ruins. I was flooded with questions as I walked unaccompanied for hours: What is the point of taking pictures if there is no way I can ever forget what I am seeing? How can anyone ever possibly feel or understand how these victims felt? Why and how can people walk and live where death rules everything? How did this go unseen?

I made my way through trees, over screeching railroad tracks, large guards in brown uniforms screaming something I couldn't understand. I noticed round buildings that stored stolen possessions, a small manmade ravine where an uprising was being put to ease, and even more of these forgotten memories and ruins, until deep in the forest I found myself standing in a field of ashes. At first I wanted to run to the edge and rip down the fence and barbed wire that contain the ashes, the people contained, too. Instead, I knelt to the ground and placed a small pebble in the grass. In Jewish culture placing a stone, large or small, on a grave is a way of honoring those who have moved on. Although Christian in belief, I felt connected to the people and their culture through the small stone I carried with me, in search of the right place to say, "I hear you."

Enthusiasm about my at first mysterious journey accumulated within me as I looked through the train window. This same conviction never faded, even as I stared into the cells of the innocent. Everything was puzzling. I was intrigued by what I couldn't apprehend. My journey through the eyes of the victims of World War II and the Holocaust intensified my determination and desire to lift others out of strife and remedy their afflictions. I accept the fact that we may never know exactly what happened at places like Auschwitz-II Birkenau, but I learned that no matter how ominous the travel may look or how far the destination may seem, we should never be afraid to board a train. If I hadn't stepped off the platform in Germany to take an unpredictable ride to Poland, I would have never discovered that one field in the center of a grim and maleficent camp was my destination.