

Visiting the buchenwald concentration camp



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The reading of the Holocaust victim's names was a bleak reminder of a trip I took with a friend to Germany in 2006. We visited many beautiful places including breathtaking castles and mountains, but the most memorable experience I have from our trip was visiting the Buchenwald Concentration Camp near Erfurt Germany. I was taught in school growing up that the Holocaust was bad. I was aware that genocide was attempted and many people were killed.

It sounds terrible to say, but I had become numb through years of hearing of the mass killings of the Holocaust over and over again, but what I wasn't ready for what I wasn't ready for were the photos of the suffering and inhumane living conditions that the victims had to live through for a long period of time before being killed. I imagine it to be similar to my reaction of seeing a dead dog on the side of the freeway (some sadness if I stop to dwell on the thought), compared to a seeing suffering dog just after being hit by the car (deep sadness to the extent of tears).

The Concentration Camp sort of opened my eyes to my inner reactions towards death and my much deeper reactions towards suffering. The Holocaust reading further showed me my reactions to death. As they read countless names of small children only 6 and 7 years old did not have a huge impact on me. The deaths of people in the past has never made me sad or impacted me really. It wasn't until images of suffering people and children came back to my mind from my Germany trip and I imagined my young nieces and nephews as some of those suffering children I saw in the photos that it became deeply moving.

I think that it is one thing to see statistics and numbers which is largely what is portrayed when we are taught about the Holocaust, but entirely another to actually hear the names one after another for hours. The sheer timeframe puts the magnitude of the Holocaust into perspective. It is a shame, though that there was pretty much nobody listening to the reading. Everyone was just walking through the Union building. Most didn't even stop to read the sign to see what the reader was even doing. I thought to myself, how long would it take me to name the names of every person that I personally know?

How would I feel if everyone basically ignored me reading the names of all my friends, family, and acquaintances that were brutally murdered in war crimes? The Holocaust has a "close to home" impact on me as my mother's family is of Jewish descent, and (as evident by my last name) my father's family is of German descent. Some would say it is an ironic match of family histories culminating in my parents then combining in my 5 sisters and I as a mix. I view it as not irony, but a step towards healing and tolerance; a step towards the contrary of Hitler's goal.

As I mentally reminisced on my visit to Buchenwald I wondered how many of the names I had heard today were the actual people in the photos I had seen of bodies stacked so high it wasn't possible to count them in the photo, photos I had seen of men as thin as a rail with every bone on their body as pronounced as though they were bursting through the strained skin. Much like giving a stray animal a name will cause sentimental attachment; giving those faces etched in my memory a name gives greater gravity to the tragedy for humanity that is the Holocaust.