

This way to the gas



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Holocaust, some know it to have been one of the most horrifying and bureaucratic events to be caused by man or a man in history. The man responsible for this event was the great tyrant Adolf Hitler who was responsible for the death of six million Jews, gypsies, Poles, and Jehovah's Witnesses. A Polish writer and Auschwitz survivor Tadeusz Borowski writes in great detail how these people were treated in his then and now famous book *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Tadek a character in the story shows conflicting attitudes with other in the camp with sympathy, anger, and moral outrage.

Borowski's short stories show man's inhumanity towards man. There are events from the short stories that make his descriptions of the horrors of Auschwitz so shocking and memorable. Memories are short stories like the beginning of *This Way for The Gas, A Day at Harmenz, The People Who Walked On, and Silence*. In the beginning of the first story *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* Borowski starts off with supersizing details "all of us walk around naked" (29). This is all the Jews and other travelers are taken on the train being promised to a safe place.

Then stripped away of their luggage at Canada, "take your luggage with you...pile your stuff near the exits" (37). Then everyone is stripped of his or her clothing "thousand of naked men shuffle up and down the road" (29). Women would have their hair shaved off, and everyone is given striped suits. "Their nude, withered bodies stink of sweat and excrement; their cheeks are hollow" (31). Again very descriptive about how the malnourished and overworked people looked. These people were as close to skeletons as you could get.

On page 43 a woman denies her own child after she cries out “ Mama! Mama! ” just so she won’t have to go to the gas chambers. Also in this short story Tadek experiences some things that any man or woman wouldn’t dream of doing. “ I seize a corpse by the hand; the fingers close tightly around mine. I pull back”(48). Tadek in this situation is taking all the dead bodies off the ramp and was shocked and frightened with what he saw. At one point he runs off the ramp because the sight was unbearable. The short story in the book *A Day at Harmenz* also gives graphic details on not only Tadek, but also how others tried to survive. The story begins with Tadek doing hard labor for punishment for not getting up. Mrs. Haneczka is a woman that lives in the village of Harmenz that treats him nicely and gives him food. So Tadek seems to like this woman but is short with others when people ask him to ask her for food. Tadek’s attitude towards other victims of the camp is expressed there. “ When your time comes to go to the gas, I’ll help you along personally, and with great pleasure”(53).

Tadek showing extreme hate towards Becker because he believes he was a camp senior at a Jewish camp outside of Poznan and had his own son killed for stealing. Could you blame Tadek for being mad? When the time came for Becker to go to the crematorium Tadek actually felt a little sympathy for him. Another example of brutality being shown was in one part of the story a man named Ivan had stolen a goose and was furiously whipped, “ the whip hissed. Deep, bloody gashes stood out on Ivan’s face”(79).

Another important short story in the book was *The People Who Walked On*. In the story there’s a shift in tone, at least in the beginning of the story. The story opens up in a peaceful setting; building a soccer field. This is the total

opposite then the frenzied horror of the first story. A soccer game on the outside of the fence on a warm day and inside the fence was hard labor. There is a woman in the story that secretly has a child Tadek looks at the child and whispered to the mother, " what a pretty child"(89). " All you know is pretty! It can die at any moment"(89). The mother is not so happy about the birth of her own child but worried that it'll be a matter of time before it dies from the gas chambers. After that Tadek walks away as if it's not his concern. This shows not only Tadek's sudden change of feelings towards this woman and her child, but shows the worry in the people's eyes they have of thinking when the day will come for them to be sent to the gas. The story Silence was somewhat of a turning point in the book that has conflicting instincts of forgiveness vs. revenge. The Americans with the freedom are oblivious of how the prisoners felt or had to deal with in the camps. The story Silence is about the freedom of the prisoners. In this story Borowski also suggests that human beings have a need for vengeance. " With hate dragged him into a dark alley... they began tearing at him with greedy hands"(161). The quote shows great detail on how they take their anger and hatred on the S. S. soldiers how they treated them like dogs. This even tells how the camp drove them to insanity.

Not even the motivated speech by the American on page 163 could stop the prisoners from trampling the S. S. soldier to death, showing how deep their hate went. Borowski along with other writers who have written about the Holocaust serve a good purpose. That purpose is remembrance. Remembering tragic events like this is important because it helps us know

and appreciate life that we have now. It's important that the past things like this should be recognized so we wont be doomed to repeat it.