

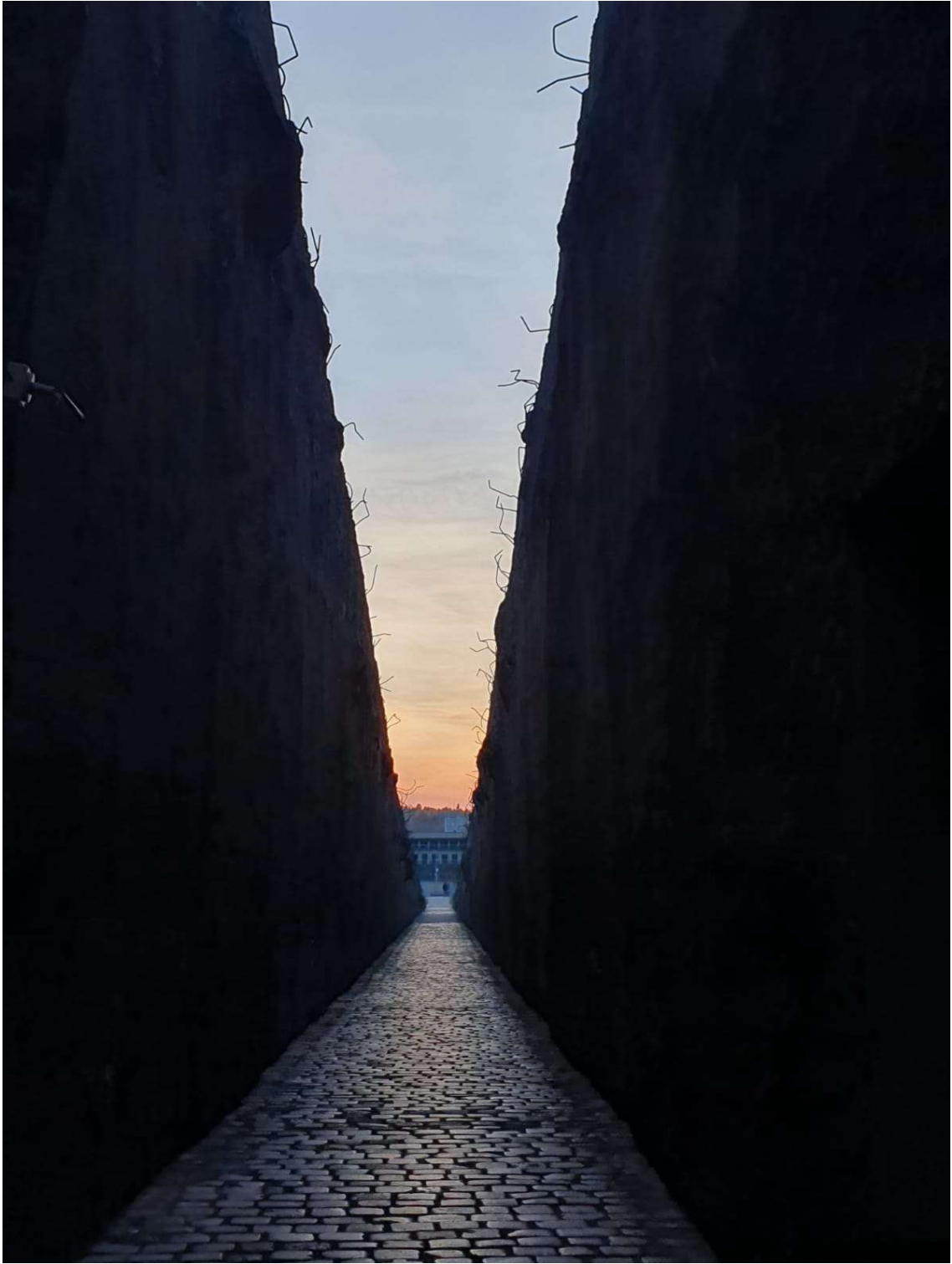
Student Reflection Project

Poland 2021

27th – 31st Oct 2021

Yavneh Girls – Reflections

Yavneh Boys – Reflections



The height of the surrounding walls in Belzec, together with the length of the pathway, radiates fear. It's the way you can see straight down to what is coming that makes it scary. The architecture of the Belzec Memorial is so peaceful and yet it reels you into a sense of foreboding and fear perhaps a glimpse of what the innocents who walked this same path may have seen and felt.

I chose this picture not only because it truly shows the last scenes that they saw but how something so scenic like a sunset doesn't always bring comfort. Behind the picture is a Pasuk saying "*Earth do not cover my blood, let there be no resting place for my outcry*" which says it all.



This part of the trip to Poland, a visit to honour murdered children, was most moving.

There aren't enough adequate words for me to describe my feelings about this because these children had any normal childhood stolen from them. They weren't able to live we. They were children just like all of us and they were unable to live a long life.

This part hit me the most as I felt my natural maternal instincts took over and made me feel the pain for the parents having their children and babies ripped out of their arms to never see them again. Thinking of it like this it truly meant a lot for me to visit this grave and gave me the meaning of life and the blessing we have by being able to live as Jews.



When I saw the bunkbeds, I knew I'd found a relatable aspect to all the pain and confusion we encountered on our journey through Poland. To me, as to most, my bed is a safe, private and comfortable place to be whereas in the camps it was a completely different experience.

Furthermost as Rabbi Olshin retold the story of siblings and the sandwich it lead me to the think about my family and what similar things we do for each other on a daily basis without risking our lives to do so.

It made me realise how the Nazis were the epitome of evil and had a complete lack of compassion for all, not just Jews



This photo shows a part of the camp with the names of communities engraved on the floor. Standing in the Belzec death camp hearing how many people were transported to the gas chambers was heart wrenching.

Moreover, seeing the mass amount of communities names on the floor, highlighting the amount of deaths gave a shocking visual reality.

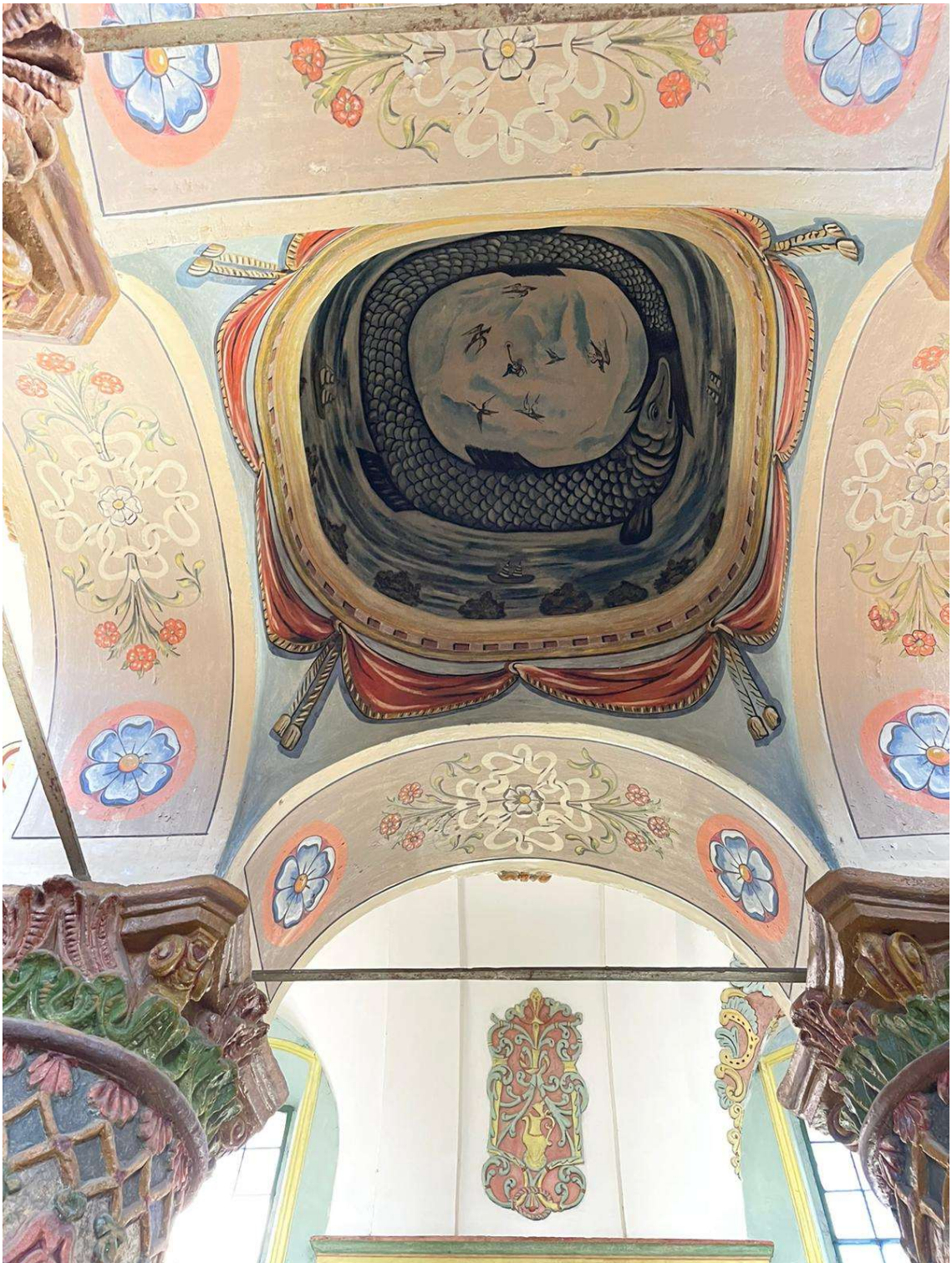
Hearing stories about Jews who were made to work for the Nazis, and one of the barbers had to cut his wife and daughters hair and couldn't tell them they were about to be gassed, was truly horrifying - even just thinking about it.

Only three people managed to escape and testify which makes you think about all these innocent individuals having their lives snatched away.

As well as that, hearing how keys were found made me think about the fact that people were planning on returning home.

After visiting here, it made me want to be more appreciative of simple and ordinary life.

I feel that the sunset in the background creates a sense of hope, considering what all these people went through we can do our best to carry out good deeds and radiate positivity in their merit.



To me, this picture echoes the culture that resounds throughout Judaism. The artistic renditions of the biblical passages gives it a unique aura. Although this synagogue in Lancut is not as grand as the Catholic churches and cathedrals, it has a pleasant ambience. In the picture you can see the *levyaton*, a giant fish. According to the prophets, when mashiach comes it will form a giant succah, and the Tzadikim will feast on it. The juxtaposition between this and the environment in post-Holocaust Poland is striking: the former is referring to freedom and dreams, the latter is to a completely non-Jewish country- Judenrein.

It is fascinating to see that these people had the same hopes and dreams as us, and it personifies them. They prayed in synagogues like we did. They would stare at the decorations like us. It exemplifies to me the devastation that the Holocaust caused; the shul was empty. The only person there was the caretaker. Synagogues are community centres. They shouldn't be desolate.



“.....From slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light.....” (Pesach Haggada)

Never before this moment have I understood this transition do starkly!

At the darkest place on earth, where so many young lives were brutally cut short, girls from different classes and interests come together in a true display of unity.

When faced with such darkness, the Jewish people react by supporting each other, embracing and singing words of comfort.

The Israeli flag in the background serves as the greatest reminder of our response, the need for a safe haven where Jews can protect themselves, and to help materialize the dream of our nation over millennia. Where Jews prayed and dreamed for thousands of years to be able to live in the Holy Land, we can now do so safely.

There is no answer to the tragedy. But the response is Israel.

__From slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light..__



This photo reflects the sentiment of light in the dark. On the surface, this idea sheds light to the notion of lighting up dark spaces - in relation to places we have visited and stories we have heard, i think this idea speaks true. By commemorating and memorialising those who perished in the Shoah , we bring light to their memory. I have personally found that by learning about unique individuals that all came to the same horrific end. Thus, upon reflection, we really can bring light to the darkest of places. This picture , standing at a memorial in a dark square that was once swarming with Jews, we brought light. In each of our lives, we battle with everyday emotions and difficulties that life throws at us. The strength of the Jewish faith is that, despite the Shoah, despite persecution, despite attempted and failed annihilation, we remain strong and unwavering. Although many died, i see our trip as an uplifting commemoration of those who were murdered. Thier deaths remind us of our privilege, and the duty we carry, to continue thier memory. They died so we could live, and even though they were exterminated, the light of the Jewish people will never be diminished.



This image allowed me to understand the importance and need for a Jewish state and that we should appreciate how lucky we are to be able to have a country to go to and will always be there for us – a state that cares for you first.

During the Holocaust there was no place of refuge. It make me feel thankful and grateful to live today and be able to have an Israel – a place where we can be proud to be Jews and have the safety of the IDF with us.



Shoes.

Heaps and heaps of shoes.

The shoes of those who never came back.

Jewish people just like me and you once wore these yet now the shoes remain and not the people. How can someone have no value of human life?

How can someone take shoes to preserve and send humans to their deaths?

The evil of the Nazis and their collaborators is something entirely incomprehensible and this we have seen throughout our trip. Each one of the shoes holds a story yet those stories we may never know. Men, women, and children. Looking at this photo reminds me that the physical things that are so vital for me on a daily basis are the things that will outlive me. We can enjoy all the beauty of this life yet the physicality will remain in the physical world. It is the soul, the *Neshama* that lives on. The souls of those who perished are on the highest of levels, yet we still mourn their loss with such agony.

These shoes represent their physical being but their soul represents their life and all they achieved. למרות הכל עם ישראל



I took this picture at Belzec, a place of secrecy and shock, where even the light struggles to settle in the pathway tunnel.

A place the world wasn't to know about.

A place of murder which screams out with every rock and twisted piece of metal.

Even so, we were privileged to stand there, witness to such tragedy and be proud Jews but we also have the chance of leaving – something 600,000 did not. There were only 3 survivors from this camp – three.

It is our responsibility to make sure we continue to be many more!



3.5 million visitors

1 million+ Jewish victims

462 acres

453 volunteer guides

174 barracks

47 languages

3 month life expectancy

And still we need to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau to learn respect for others.



This image has influenced me in the way to understand the cruelty and disregard for Jewish life by the Nazis.

This image represents the Jews of Josefow gunned down in the forest and brutally murdered because of a basic hatred of the Jews. The pit / grave has an unusual structure due to the many Jewish bodies that were buried here during July 1942.

The ground was said to have been moving for three days afterwards as many people weren't completely dead trying to take their last gasp of life, struggling to survive as they were buried by the weight of bodies above them.

These people men, women and children who didn't deserve this torture which made it very difficult to deal with.

This site was special to me.

We were able to say kaddish and sing in honour of these fallen Jews.

ALINA KALMA KALMA
EMEL LENA LENI LEO
MAJER MAJLECH MAJLI
LECH MEIR MEJER MEL
MORITZ MORYC MOSCH
KA NUSEN NUSYN NUT
CHMIEL RAFAEL RAFAŁ
VEN RUZENA RYFKA RY
WERYN SIEGFRIED SIGMU
ASIA SZEINDEL SZEJNA SZ
A TOBIAS TOBIASZ TOIBA
ALOL ZAŁKA ZANWEL ZD

This picture is from the memorial at the Belzec death camp and shows hundreds of different names including my own from all different communities and backgrounds who were killed here.

It shows that no matter who you were, where you came from, or what your background was, the Nazis were out to kill you. The Nazis decided who was a Jew. This made me realise even though we all have different beliefs and ideas we are all one community.

At home we separate ourselves into all different types of groups: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Lubavitch, Hasidic, religious, secular, conservative, and non-religious – and for the most part we stay in our community but it's when we branch out to other communities ignore our differences this is when the best outcome occurs. We focus so much on our differences that at times we forget on who we are no matter who you are, where you come from.

We are all Jews. We all have a voice. We have a collective identity.



I've learnt a lot about the holocaust. Much more than I did before I went on this trip and I'm glad I came.

This photo gives me the feeling of togetherness and that we were always and always will be together throughout everything that comes in our path. This has made me think differently about life and about my heritage. I've learnt that we need to appreciate everything in life and don't take anything for granted and that we should find gratitude towards everything we do in life and fulfil to our fullest potential. My feelings and attitude towards Judaism has definitely grown stronger and more passionate as I've learnt more about the tragic things that used to happen to my religion.

Seeing what happened to my grandpa and his whole family has been very emotional and educational for me. It has taught me a lot about how life was back in those times and how terribly they were treated for just being a little different from other people, just like we see in the picture of people walking.



זהו מקום המזכיר להשמדת
שבו נרצחו כחצי מיליון
בחודשים פברואר-דצמבר
בית גרמניה הנאצית
אדני אלהים כסני דמי וני
ואם פניו יזו

MIEJSCE MECZEŃSKIEJ
OKOŁO 500 000 OFIAR
OBOZU ZAGŁADY ŻYDÓW
ZAMORDOWANYCH W
OD LUTEGO DO GRUDNIA
PRZEZ HITLEROWSKIE
ZIEMIO, NIE KRYJ MOJE
IZBY MÓJ KRZYK NIE UCISZ
KSIEGA HIOBA 16,18

Feelings of sadness, shock and destruction emanate from the wall shown in the picture. On the wall shows the words 'זהו מקום המחנה להשמדת יהודים בליז'ץ שבו כחצי מילין קורבנות'. 'This is the site of the murder of about 500 000 victims of the belzec death camp established for the purpose of killing the Jews of Europe, whose lives were brutally taken'.

Just imagining what these and millions of other were dealing with, could put a shiver through anybody's spine. Simple human morals being ripped apart in such vicious styles treating life with no value. The things that we can all do today that so many would never even dream of doing 80 years ago.

This takes a toll on me and allows me to dig deeper into my personality and really bring out the best of me. So many people were restricted from so much Simcha and couldn't even do the most simple religious acts of ברית מילן.

Boruch Hashem we live in generation where we can have a Bris, we can ley'in the Torah not in hiding but rather with spirit and motivation. I feel it is mine and every other Jew's duty to help other Jews with Chizuk and spread as much Simcha as possible into the world.



Looking upon a place where such inhumane actions occurred and realising what is before you changes the view of how awful some people are.

To think that children were murdered without hesitation, babies brutalised without care was horrifying and deeply upsetting.



When we stood in the forest, on the first day of our Poland trip, there struck a chord in all of our lives, which took us to stop and look around. I looked at what I perceived to be important. The things I believed to be either encouraged or disparaged, all found themselves under both slander and praise. The Decendants of the United Kingdom of Israel and Judea. We carry their shadow with us, both the murdered, and the long gone.

Never in our long history have we faced such threats of danger and destruction. Their hopes and dreams have not died with them.

We are that proof.



Just opposite the Jozefow woods where hundreds of families were brutally murdered in open pits and discarded like trash, is this beautiful, tranquil scene.

Who would have thought such atrocities could have occurred in a place so serene. A place of such beauty, such harmony, desecrated by such vicious actions. Such were the actions of the Nazis, actions that have left the bloodiest scars across the Jewish nation, scars that my parents have lived with, that I have lived with, and my children will live with forevermore.



This image has highlighted to me the sheer volume of the atrocities that took place. The number of souls, be it kids or adults, that were lost is just mind-boggling.

Who could ever dream of such a thing?

How could anyone in their right minds kill people purely based on their religion?

How lucky are we that we live in a time of security, a time where we can be proud to be Jewish?

How lucky are we that we have a country that we can call home?

How lucky are we that we have the opportunities we do?



The image above is of the old shul in Lancut, Poland. Beautiful, it is said to be the birthplace of the Hasidic movement, the Jewish mysticism that started in the 1600's. The shul radiates something magical, an aura of the holiness of the past, a resplendent dance of the mystics. Timeless. The energy remains and is preserved by the man in this picture, Mirek. Although not Jewish by virtue, the man feels the deep breaths of the shul and continues to keep it breathing, beating and sharing its magic.

Here in this shul we danced together..... And with the Jews once there, their souls felt present. Although now gone, their legacy is not lost. Their spirits continue, we must continue.



The vast quantity of shoes present in the cages provides a somewhat relatable and visual dynamic to the endeavour in understanding the sheer number of people who were put through the horrendous concentration camps, with each pair of shoes representing one life. This being said, the cages only hold a mere fraction of the shoes stolen from the victims of the Nazis.

In place of the shoes purloined by the Nazis, the victims were given a shoddy form of footwear. A story of a victim of the camps managed to keep his boots. These boots were sturdy and warm, perhaps capable of saving a person from death. This man always slept on top of his boots, as to protect them from theft. One unfortunate day he fell asleep with his legs hanging over his bed. During the night he felt a tug on his feet - his boots had been taken.

The man ran outside to catch the thief, but was unable to reclaim his shoes.

A pair of shoes can save your life.



Poland is often seen as a land of the dead, where so many were brutally murdered from the horrid Nazis, *Yemach Shemom*. But through this week I have learned that things keep changing. The lavish Jewish life of Krakow destroyed and all of the vibrant towns, once filled with Jewish life transformed into desolate, eerie areas.

From this destruction blossomed a new age, with the birth of Israel and growth of other towns in the world. In this last week we brought back life to these lands, returned the *ruach* to places that rarely see Jewish life.

Whilst we reflected on the past we also looked to the future learning how these lessons would affect our lives, learning to take responsibility for our fellow Jew and to move past our small differences and instead work together for our main goal.

And this is what this picture represents, our ability to escape our closed minds and move past barriers that were never there. we danced with people we had never met and we prayed for people we barely knew and came out.



The scale of the holocaust. 6 million is an unimaginable number and as we are told we need to think about just one person and it brings the scale into perspective. But at Majdanek the ashes of anywhere between 40,000 - 500,000 (because who knows how many were murdered) puts it into perspective very well.

They make an enormous pile. If they were still bodies it would be even bigger. This is only 1 of 647 concentration camps. The amount of death and pain and suffering is too great for a single person and too big to be forgotten.



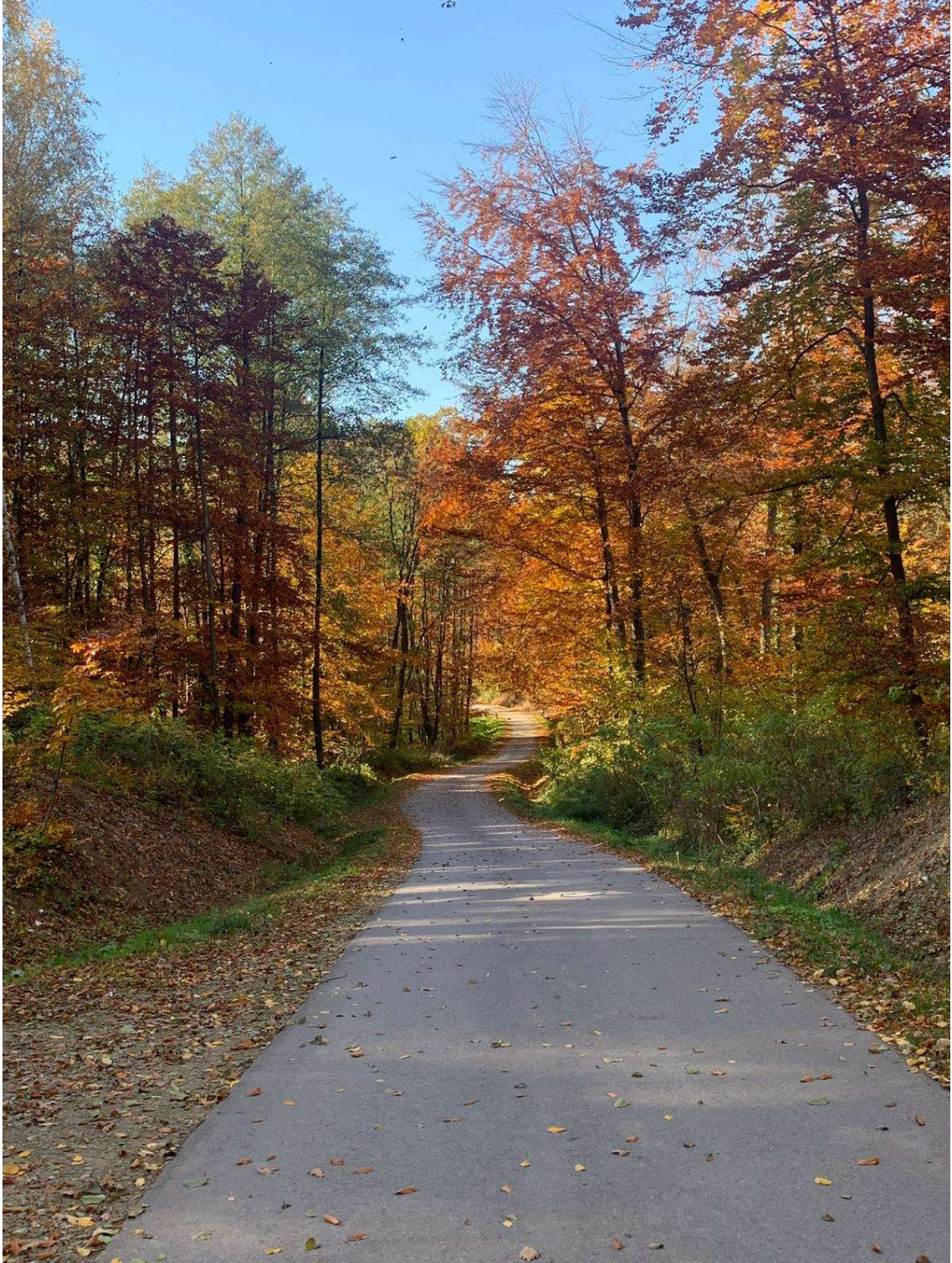
500 police were asked if they could kill all Jewish men, women and children in the town of Jozefów, 2% said they can't do it and we told them to do another job. Meaning 98% agreed to go through with killing the Jews in a forest (then the Jews were later dumped in pits in the forest).

It is shocking that these reserve policemen agreed to kill Jews but even more so as they knew they were killing innocent men, women, children. They dehumanised/stripped them of any human rights, chased them towards pits and then slaughtered them in cold blood. The thing that freaks me out the most is that it was optional. These men are the definition of beasts (animals). As well a deep and scary thought is that not all death camps or areas where Jews were killed have been discovered, so we don't know everyone who died, where they died, the amount of them and even where they are buried.



I share this picture of the shoes at the Majdanek storage unit because it made me wonder who these may have belonged to.

Even if they weren't murdered in Majdanek or even Jewish... they were once on someone's feet that was living or at least been through a camp like that.



The children's grave we visited was one of the most moving moments.

It has taught me a lesson on loving your family and friends, being unconditionally supportive, not taking advantage of their presence.



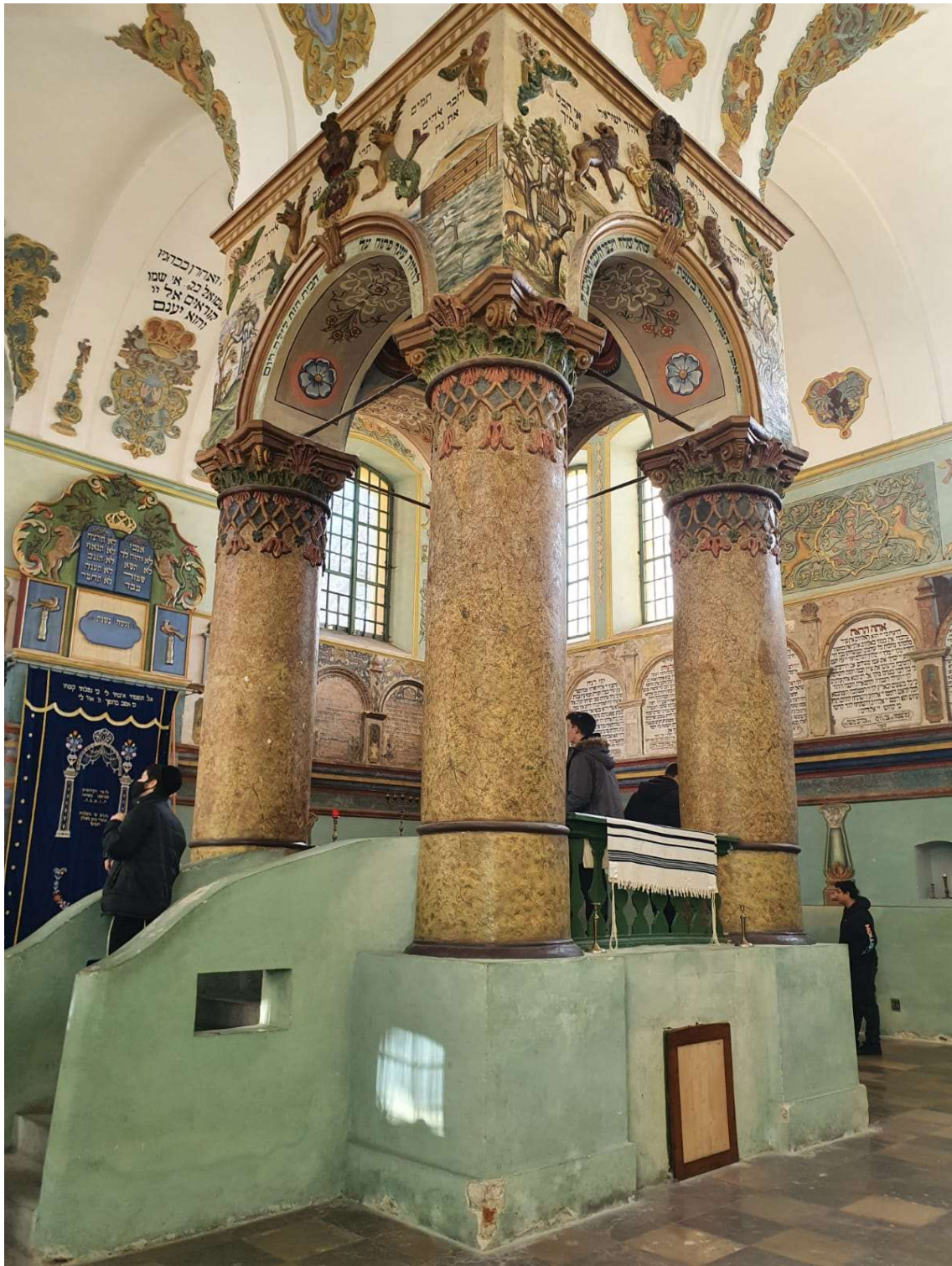
This image taken just in front of the famed Yeshivat Chochmei Lublin is me and my brother.

I learnt a lot on this trip but the stories and moments that resonated most were those regarding family and in particular, siblings. The stories of the horrifying events and action Nazis perpetrated against families made relationships choiceless – especially against the ones that are often closest too us.

Seeing the beautiful cities of Poland and in particular the Jewish parts of these cities reminded me of the beauty that is around you all the time – family.



400,000. The concept of that number is hard to imagine and it's something that I've been thinking about and still after a few days I can't comprehend the number of shoes that were there. If you think about the people who were in those shoes, the people who died wearing those shoes it makes a person reflect and think about what type of life those people lived and how much they sacrificed to get those shoes and how fortunate I am to be lucky enough to have many pairs of shoes which was something that they were not fortunate enough to have. It makes a person wonder what would happen if I were in their shoes?



In this photo is the lancut shul, restored with the hands and energy of one man who is not a Jew.

The shul's very existence shows us that no matter what the Nazis did they were not able to destroy the Jews and that we are still thriving and are located throughout the world and have many big communities and many great rabbanim whilst they have been brought to nothing and are just a faint memory to everyone.

It showed me that even if a building can get destroyed and then rebuilt then even with everything that a person goes through they can get back up and carry on no matter what and are able to get back up even from the lowest and darkest points in their lives.



The sky is grey as we walk through the rows and rows of barracks at Majdanek, heading toward the crematorium. I was walking with my group, discussing what we'd seen and how we were feeling when I saw a sight that turned my stomach.

A couple with a baby in a pram, walking through the camp as though this is just a family activity, just another museum for a Sunday morning. As though this is a totally normal place to take a baby.

This is why we come to Poland. This is my third time in Poland and although I hate every second of being in this country, walking on this ground splattered with our people's blood, this is why we come. Because otherwise this becomes just a tourist attraction, it will lose the accounts of the survivors. It will lose the testimonials they bring. It will lose the fact that this happened to us, to our family, to our people. We come even though we need a security guard with us at all times. We come even though we can feel the unwelcoming glares every time we step into a village that has faded mezuzah prints on the doorpost.

We come so we can sing, so we can daven, so we can say Kaddish, so we can learn in zchut of the victims. We come so we can show them that it was not in vain. That we are strong, our spirits were not broken. We as a nation are thriving, we have our own country, finally a homeland. We have new generations of beautiful children, following in our traditions. We are here.

We come so we never forget, so this never happens again.