

We are ALL witnesses to Auschwitz and the Shoah, what are our obligations, now, and to the generations to come?

by Paul S. Nussbaum

My name is Paul Nussbaum, I would like to first acknowledge with great respect: the Magnificent Rector of the Jagiellonian University Professor Nowak, the Rectors, the Deans and the other Authorities of the Jagiellonian University and the Faculty of Medicine at the Jagiellonian University Medical College, Consuls General of the Federal Republic of Germany, the French Republic and the United States of America, in addition, the President of the Krakow Doctor's Society, the Representatives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Survivors of Auschwitz Birkenau present today and the President of the Jewish Community in Kraków – Mr. Tadeusz Jakubowicz.

I am speaking to you from Los Angeles, California in the United States and more precisely, I am speaking to you from the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, where I have the honor to serve on the Executive Board of the Board of Directors.

Our Museum was founded in 1961 by a local group of Holocaust Survivors to bear witness to the Shoah and to remember and honor all those who suffered so greatly and those that perished in the depths of that inhumanity. The founders wanted the Museum to act as a place to house precious personal artifacts and 55 years later the Museum has grown to be a repository of archives that is now nearing one million artifacts.

The Founding Survivors endeavored to teach about the dangers of Racial Genocide, and promote Empathy, Tolerance and Understanding through Education, Shared Knowledge and Personal Experience.

I am *also* speaking to you as a Second Generation Holocaust Survivor *and* as a WITNESS.

I bear witness to my Grandparents, Samu Rozman and Malka Rozman, who were murdered at Birkenau. *I bear witness* to Barna Rozman, my Mother's 16-year Brother, who was murdered at Birkenau. *I bear witness* to my Great Grandmother, Grossman, Fani, who was murdered at Birkenau. *I bear witness* to the scores of Nuszbaums, Rozmans, Grossmans, and Bravermans who also perished at Birkenau.

I bear witness with heightened criticality and responsibility, for there are no archival records of any of my immediate family members being at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those family members were all driven directly from the infamous RAMP at Birkenau to be murdered in the Gas Chambers in June of 1944.

There were 436,000 Hungarian Jews murdered in twelve weeks' time, with the active and many times enthusiastic collaboration of the Hungarian Government, along with Regional, Local and Clerical officials, and *I bear witness* to that blot on Hungarian History.

I ask and honestly plead with all of you to *bear witness* along with me for my Grandparents, Uncle, my Great Grandmother and my other cherished family members, unknown to me or my progeny.

To quote Elie Wiesel (may his memory be a blessing): "To listen to a witness is to become a witness."

To bear witness comes with the obligation to Testify to our shared humanity, the power of Hate, and all its many tentacles of destruction that lie in wait for the innocent, who are encountered in its path.

To bear witness is to educate oneself, one's family, one's community as to how humanity ended up at such a previously unknown hell that was Auschwitz-Birkenau and all the other places of massive human destruction.

For we are ALL WITNESSES and must bear witness through TESTIMONY for all those whose lives and dreams and legacies were cut short at Auschwitz and all the multitudes of hellish places that originally emanated from otherness, de-humanization, indifference, and silence.

We must bear witness NOW, because, as I look across the landscape of Europe, Great Britain and shamefully I must admit, my beloved United States, the seeds of otherness have sprouted and are being fertilized by the *Sowers of Hate, Fear and Intolerance*.

We know, oh so well, where Silence and Indifference lead us, as it has so many times before when we first began with otherness, separation, demonization, and violence, as the Flames of Hate were stoked.

Being a Witness can no longer be Passive and merely lost in the annals of history, by its deafening silence. We must Testify about the Paths of Destruction, that may seemingly begin as mere "Political Expression." Bearing Witness must be a Clarion Call to Action and vigorously against Silence and Indifference. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with *the new Others*, and promote Tolerance, Understanding, and Testify to the lessons of History as we gather today at the Epicenter of the Holocaust.

At the inauguration of the United States President's Holocaust Commission, Elie Wiesel proclaimed: "*We have learned* not to be neutral in the time of crisis, for neutrality helps the aggressor, never the victim. *We have learned* that silence is never the answer. *We have learned* that the opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference; indifference is what we must guard against."

I cannot end without making mention to all those gathered in the amazing and beautiful city of Kraków, which I had the good fortune to visit with my family some years back, my deep admiration for this generation of Polish Youth that have become the Sacred Guardians of Jewish Holy Sites and as importantly, the restoration of the intricate place in Polish History that Jewish History has played for a millennium before its attempted destruction during the Nazi Era.

The concept that always moves me and the center of my sincere Gratitude is: "No one can truly understand Polish History without Polish Jewish History." This redeems my soul and gives me much hope that we will weather this current storm with what we are all here today to do by Bearing Witness Today and by preserving our Testimony for the generations to come.

Today, we commemorate and Today we mourn, for this place (Auschwitz-Birkenau) is a hallowed and sacred ground and the last resting place of so many known, and so many unknown and a symbol of all the scores of other such places, that require us to guard *the memory* and *enshrine in our hearts* and *in our minds* and also *from our lips to bear the Testimony*, from today and into perpetuity.

I am most appreciative to be given the opportunity to be with all of you today and sincerely thank you and respectfully salute all that you are contributing to our shared Humanity.

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I welcome comments or contacts at Paul@lamothe.org