

Dedication Speech - Steven Pelcman

We are here today because somewhere in our souls and hearts we feel the pain and suffering of mankind that forces us to look inward and remember what life and love, family and dreams are all about. We are here because it could not be otherwise for the fear of not remembering is far greater and more dangerous to the sanctity of human life.

In earth and stone, the dried blood and lingering memories millions of Jews and non-Jews, of men and women and children, of the poor and the wealthy, of the intellectuals and the laborers, of the old and the young, the healthy and the infirmed, of the dreamers and the doers; those that gave the very measure of all they were and could be; we stand in their shadows and feel the loss of life.

And yet, we are here to celebrate their lives for they had also given purpose to the world. For the first time in the history of the world, the great evil and suffering that took place in the many concentration camps spread throughout Germany and in other countries also gave birth to a new sense of humanity. Organizations and support groups, institutions, money and law, countries and governments, people of all races and religions took up verbal arms and understood that such a war must never take place again. The killing that endured for years and the effort to wipe out an entire race did not and could not succeed. Mankind only discovered the great shame and destruction that such a war can reap on any people and on any culture. All these years later, Germany has risen from the ashes to become a free and democratic state. It is a tribute to the German people and to Germany, to Jews throughout the world, to those that challenge dictators and despots and stand up for their rights, that no philosophical ideology full of hatred can ever truly win in the long run. Even in death, life can have value and it is that value that brings us together today.

I wrote these lines in a poem about my father who died of Alzheimer's in 2009 and had been sent to this camp from Auschwitz:

How proud he would be
to know, if he could remember,
sons can be born
from the agony of golden
teeth pulled from the dead.

Jews survived. Germany survived. The world of nations survived and in surviving we have been given another chance to do the good work done here where we stand today. To Volker and the staff of dedicated men and women maintaining this facility and being a part of the consciousness, we owe a debt of gratitude. To the writers and painters, the artists and poets, to the film makers and journalists, to the politicians and to those that donate their time and money and lend a voice to protect the rights of all men and stand up for freedom, we ask you to continue doing your good work for it is that work that helps to protect the future from such evil destruction.

And to the school children that read books and visit museums and visit a camp, we say, learn and understand that respecting other people is a form of self respect and that killing one person is killing everyone killing everyone, you kill yourself; there is no honor in that sort of death for it makes us less than who we are.

And when we look out into the open space and fields of where a camp had stood and see the images our closed eyes press hard against, we feel the darkness and remember the screams and the agony, but also the hope that by remembering the past we can try to protect the future from this ever happening again.

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