

Besma Bokhamy

Reflections from Auschwitz 2016-2017

Last year in October 2016, Ella and I were lucky enough to be able to represent the school, Enfield County, by taking an active part in the Holocaust Educational Trust's **Lessons from Auschwitz** project. There we attended meetings where we met other Post 16 students from across North London and reflected on the Holocaust; we tried to define it in its historical context and focused on ways to commemorate those involved in the persecution and murder. As part of the project, we were able to visit Auschwitz 1 and Auschwitz -Birkenau, which was the largest of the Nazi concentration and death camps. Having witnessed the camps in real life, it was indescribable. There was no way to mentally prepare ourselves to visit a place of genocide. Moreover, although visiting the camps I did not cry, I think it is the inability to speak, or to cry or to react in anyway that speaks louder than any cry. It was so chilling seeing the photographic images of the individuals persecuted and murdered during the Holocaust that were displayed throughout Auschwitz 1. The fear in their eyes is an image I will not forget. And one of which I should and will not forget. My way of reacting to the shocking and bareness of the camps was to write a poem, in memorial for the victims of the Holocaust. For it is like Santayana said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

It is our responsibility, **our duty** to raise awareness and remember the crimes against humanity.

Witnessing the bundles of hair that was forcefully shaved off the Jews shocked me. There was just so much hair. The image of the keys is an image I will continue to hold with me as they represent so much more than just owning a home. They represent the hope of the Jews' return, a hope that was stripped from them. On our return, Ella and I felt extremely motivated to spread the message and raise awareness of the Holocaust to continue its legacy. In our Next Steps project we issued images of keys, reminiscent of that we saw at Auschwitz, and asked the girls in our school to write about an individual who allowed their life to go on. This message of hope was very poignant because having met with numerous Holocaust survivors, especially Danny Spiro, he was such a happy and optimistic person. Particularly when dealing with such a serious topic at hand, it is important to continue to show positivity and we made this clear in our whole school assemblies during January, leading up to Holocaust Memorial Day in January 27th 2017. Also, I wrote a poem, called 'Don't forget your keys,' which I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to showcase to the **Department of Education** with the Holocaust Educational Trust.

Ella and I continue to work alongside the Trust as Regional Ambassadors and continue to spread the message of hope and raise awareness of the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance within education.