

My spiritual homecoming through Auschwitz

In many ways, my work in Germany with Ingo Jahrsetz began for me when my husband Marty and I decided to visit Auschwitz. The reason for this was that our daughter had visited it when she was studying in Budapest, and she wanted her parents to have this experience as well.

We picked a random week in November, 1989 and flew into Berlin because the air fares were cheaper than if we flew directly to Poland.

Upon arriving, we saw the wall separating the East from the West, then we rented a car and drove to Poland.

Friday was our day spent in Auschwitz. If any of you have ever visited a concentration camp, I'm sure you can understand the devastation we felt as we spent the day in such a place.

The fact that we learned from the TV that the day before the wall came down meant very little. All I could feel after Auschwitz was rage towards all Germans and a deep pain in my soul.

And then after the awful day at Auschwitz, we were driving to a train station so we could take an over night train back to Berlin to fly home. On the way, we stopped at a restaurant to try and eat something in a town in Poland.

There were few people there, except for some people sitting in the back of the restaurant laughing and drinking alcohol.

After ordering our meal, one of the men in the group came staggering up to our table. Where are your ancestors from, he asked with a jeer?

Before we could answer, he pointed his finger at us and screamed "Jude."

Marty and I paid for our uneaten meals and silently walked out.

We were two of the first people to get on the all night train back to Berlin so we found two seats together.

Then throughout the night, the train stopped at many east German towns and villages. Before long the train was filled with men and women – young and old, children and babies - squeezed in the train, standing all night, tears in their eyes, holding crumpled papers with addresses of loved ones they hadn't seen for some thirty years, flowers to bring them, and incredible joy because the wall came down and they could come home, at long last.

Somewhere on this train my heart opened - the hatred and rage I had felt for all Germans after seeing Auschwitz began to dissolve. My spiritual journey that long night took me through the darkest of the dark to the most illuminating light.

When the train stopped, Marty and I ran with the others - hugging them, drinking the Champagne at the border, and crying alongside the east German soldiers who had put their guns down and cried with everyone else.

In those very special moments, I felt a connection with my German brothers and sisters - as we shared together a monumental event - that will be with me for the rest of my life. In my heart I realized for the first time how we are all one.

Today, there is a glass box displayed in my home that holds bone chips of my ancestors that I dug from the soil in Auschwitz, alongside a piece of the wall that came tumbling down on that special day.