

# Scottish Schools visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau



## Personal Reflections

23rd November, 2005



Organised by Jim Murphy MP and Ken Macintosh MSP



# Introduction

## One Person *Can* Make a Difference

The National Holocaust Memorial Day is now in its 6th year. Despite all of the publicity surrounding the 60th anniversary of Auschwitz, BBC research revealed that 60% of those under 35 had not heard of Auschwitz and knew little of that dark period in human history.

In conjunction with the Holocaust Educational Trust, we decided to organise the first ever visit by Scottish school pupils to Auschwitz. The aim of the event was to provide Scottish school pupils and teachers with an eye witness account in the build up to the National Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January. For the visit to achieve its purpose we asked that participants agree to share their experiences with fellow pupils and staff, or participate in local Holocaust Memorial Day events in the community. In this way our visit could reach thousands of others.

This booklet recalls the vivid recollections of those who participated in the visit. The reflections of the students are poignant and moving. It is an event that will live with them forever. This highlights once again the importance of remembrance.

We were delighted that Ernest Levy, a survivor of 7 camps, and a man who has made Scotland his home was able to meet with the students before the visit. We were also honoured to be accompanied by Rabbi Marcus. Both these gentlemen have contributed to this booklet, and we would like to thank them for all their assistance and support.

Our visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau took place on 23rd November, 2005 with teachers, pupils, representatives from organisations and private individuals participating in the one-day visit. The Personal Reflections detailed in this booklet show that the visit has left an unforgettable emotional and educational mark on all who participated.

The theme for this year's Memorial Day is "One Person *Can* Make a Difference." During the Holocaust everyone had to make moral choices – some become perpetrators and others were bystanders. A small minority chose to help – they were the rescuers. These people risked their lives, and those of their families, and indeed many lost their lives through their selfless acts. This dispels the argument "I am only one person, what can I do?" and shows that one person can achieve a great deal, however modest their actions may initially appear.

We hope that all those who participated in this visit will go back to their communities as stronger individuals after their experience and that we will all value a free, tolerant and democratic society where everyone can be equal.



**Jim Murphy MP**



**Ken Macintosh MSP**



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# Holocaust Educational Trust



We at the Holocaust Educational Trust are delighted to support Jim Murphy MP and Ken Macintosh MSP in organising this exceptional one day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is the first time that such a visit has taken place solely for Scottish schools and we hope that it will set a precedent for the future.

The Holocaust Educational Trust has been running similar visits for students and teachers for seven years, in that time we have taken over 3000 participants to see the former Nazi camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Our courses are based on the principle that hearing about something is different from seeing it with your own eyes. We believe that by taking this opportunity to see Auschwitz-Birkenau your personal understanding of the Holocaust will be deepened. As part of the visit we hope that you will begin to appreciate that all involved in the Holocaust were individual human beings – this applies as much to the bystanders and perpetrators as to those who were persecuted.

The visit is a very personal experience for each of you, and will affect everyone in different ways. Previous participants on our visits have spoken of their delayed reaction to what they have seen, and found the opportunity to talk to others about the visit very important.

Some people may ask what relevance there is in learning and teaching about the Holocaust today. At the Holocaust Educational Trust we believe that the lessons we can learn from this catastrophic event have a contemporary relevance. As an educational organisation, we are committed to teaching the lessons of the Holocaust, lessons that illustrate the horrific consequences of, amongst other things, prejudice and racism and what can happen when good people do nothing.

We hope that each of you will find this visit extremely worthwhile and rewarding and that, however hard it may be at times, you will look back on it and be pleased that you participated.

**Karen Pollock**  
*Chief Executive*

**Kay Andrews**  
*Head of Education*

[www.het.org.uk](http://www.het.org.uk)

# Rev. Ernest Levy

We were honoured to have Rev. Ernest Levy address our group the evening before our visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Below is a transcript of the speech by Rev. Levy:



I have been asked to come here to give a first hand account of what happened to the world in our time not so long ago, because there are so few left of us survivors.

We are getting desperately old to go out in the world and give the testimony. 60 years now, six decades have passed since the gates of the murder camps opened and fascism and racism and Nazism were finally defeated. 60 years ago it was liberated. Because the war was terrible we know that, absolutely terrible. But the Nazi concentration camps were an atrocity beyond imagination.

When I talk to you I have got to relive again these horrors. I was only 19 when I arrived in Auschwitz, and I found myself in a place of evil, evilness beyond imagination. Never in history did you think that such evil existed. Such organised cruelty. The Holocaust was unique in the sense that they didn't just want to kill the people and to wipe out generations and generations and cultures; they were out to degrade and to humiliate and to de-humanise people, in every way. That was Nazi Germany.

When you will be in Birkenau tomorrow and you will kindle the lights, think of my father 54, my sister 28, my brother 21 and many other relations, have them in mind. Because I can't go there, I can't make myself go there to pay my respects, I can't go back, I'm frightened to go back.

I arrived actually in Auschwitz and was then transferred to Birkenau and taken to Block 11, the infamous Block 11. The conditions there are totally indescribable, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people in that block 11, no food, no water, no nothing, no toilets. You are standing ankle deep in the urine, indescribable. I was lying on the bunk bed, totally exhausted. Two or three other people on top of me, you eventually wake up and there were no windows in that place. No windows, there were only grills, ceiling grills, and the Polish prisoners were there for years practically. Completely dehumanised already, they came to the grill pressed down their face onto the grill, and they are laughing, and they see how some people start praying in the corner and they said in Yiddish, "*It will not help you, you will just escape from here through the chimney.*" That was our welcome in Birkenau – You won't escape but only through the chimney. I give you just a little bit, an idea of what was going on there, in the heart of Europe, a mass criminal enterprise par excellence against innocent people only because of their origin, over which nobody has got control – who has got control of their descent or origin? – and that was our sin. I was there for a full year and witnessed the super human being, the master race in action, killing, killing, killing and killing and degrading and humiliating. I tell you the disgrace of Nazi Germany can never ever be obliterated that's for sure.

Although I carry no hatred in my heart – on the contrary when everything was over all we wanted was just an end to this senseless suffering – no one dreamed of revenge or anything.

When you go there tomorrow I can only tell you that you are on a mission, ladies and gentleman, you are on a mission; your mission is to make sure that an event like the Holocaust is never forgotten, that's your mission. Remember you do not just go on a day outing, you go on a mission; you will make sure that anything like that could not happen to the world again. It takes a lot out of me to go back and look back but I feel it is my duty to come and speak because there are so few left of us.

OFFICE HOURS  
Sunday & Friday 9.30am to 12.30pm  
Monday to Thursday 9am to 4.00pm

Rabbi Barry Marcus BA (Hons) P.G.C.E.

On the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day, the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet Army on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1945, we are sadly once again faced with the threat of genocide and Holocaust denial, not from some obscure peripheral group, but from the President of Iran. Furthermore, it is reported, he is arranging a conference to discuss the "myth" of the Holocaust. One cannot begin to comprehend the pain and distress this causes especially to Holocaust Survivors.

The perverse distortions emanating from Tehran are sadly not isolated incidents. We have of late, all too frequently heard similar statements from people in responsible positions, in the media, as also others who trivialize the Holocaust.

Verbal abuse that betrays prejudice is often the precursor to victimization and persecution and if not denounced, will encourage others to follow suit.

The recent one day visit of teachers and students from Scotland so efficiently organized by Jim Murphy MP and Ken Macintosh MSP, and for which they are to be commended, is all the more important in view of the above and the current wave of Anti Semitism especially across Europe and elsewhere.

It is hoped that all those who so kindly participated in the one day trip on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005 will, in being witnesses to the horrors of the Holocaust become ambassadors of goodwill in an attempt to foster understanding and tolerance amongst all peoples and nations.



Rabbi B.MARCUS.

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# Itinerary

## 23rd November 2005

- 05.00 Check-in at Glasgow Airport (Main Terminal)
- 07.00 Astraeus Airlines flight departs for Krakow.
- 10.45 Arrive at Krakow Airport.
- 10.45–11.30 Transfer from aircraft through customs to allocated coaches.
- 11.30–12.30 Journey from Krakow Airport to Auschwitz.
- 12.30–17.00 Tour of Auschwitz and Birkenau.  
*(Please note that after the tour of Auschwitz, we shall re-board the coaches for the short journey to Birkenau).*
- 17.00–19.00 Re-board coaches for drive to Krakow visiting the Jewish Quarter.
- 20.00 Check-in at Krakow Airport for Astraeus Airlines flight.
- 21.00 Flight departs from Krakow.
- 23.00 Arrival at Glasgow Airport.

Rabbi Barry Marcus will lead the group in prayer services. He will address the group during the flight.

A prayer service will be held at Birkenau on the site of the former gas chamber. Memorial candles will be distributed for lighting at the end of the service. A torch may be useful in Birkenau.



*The Scottish schools group at the gates of Auschwitz 1*

# Testimonies – A Letter of Love

**This is a remarkable Testimony of Miriam bas Leiba. So moving is her experience we have included it in this book of Personal Reflections.**

Dear Mirele

I can't believe I have one night to stuff a lifetime of love into this letter.

Tomorrow morning – if 4am can be called morning, I am giving you up. I am taking you, Mirele, to the back entrance of dear, brave Hermann's grocery and the child rescuers will be waiting there for you and the thirty-two other children under the age of three. They'll inject you with a sedative so you won't cry and then they'll slip off in the predawn with you – my life, my love, out of this barbaric country to safety.

We pushed it off, Mirele. We didn't want to believe we would have to give up our child, probably never to see her again. But this is the last child rescue. After this there will be none left to rescue, because tomorrow, our informers tell us, is the last big round up. Tomorrow they come for men, woman and children. And I have been convinced by these words, spoken by our trusted informer, Hermann, the brave gentile doctor, "Any child they take away either dies immediately or dies on the way to the death camp."

The word death three times in one sentence! We were the last ones to be convinced to be giving up our child. He said finally, with the deepest sadness in every exhausted wrinkle in his face, "I cannot force you. But if you keep her with you, she will be dead in a month. They have no use for babies, she cannot work for them. If you want to give her to us, bring her to the back entrance of my grocery at 4am. No belongings, whatever food you have. Goodbye".

Mirele, do you see why I have to give you up? He said no belongings, but I will beg, I will plead that this letter be allowed to go, sewn into your undershirt. And then, I will pray to G-d that the letter stays with you until you are old enough to read it. You must know that we love you. You must know why you are alone, without parents. Not because they didn't love you ... but because they did!

It's eerie to think that by the time you read this I will probably be dead. That's what Hermann says is going on. People either die immediately or on the way or after a week or two of forced labour and no food. But I won't have lived in vain, Mirele, if I know that I brought you into the world and you will live and survive and grow big and strong and you will be happy. You can be happy, Mirele, because we loved you.



*Photographs from the "Before They Died" exhibition in Birkenau*

What makes the differences in the lives of adults, it seems, is if they had secure childhoods. Secure with lots of love and acceptance and needs fulfilled and predictable routine and the like. You've had that up to this minute. You'll have it up till 4am. But then you won't. Who knows who will end up taking care of you? Some family who will take you in for the money Hermann will pay them? They will surely be kinder to their own than to you.

Here is where pain mixes with rage! I rage at the animals who are making it possible for you to cry and I won't be there to comfort you.

But you will have this letter, and this letter will make you feel secure, if G-d answers my prayers. You have us, Mirele, even though you don't see us, we're with you. We're watching you and praying for you. Every time you have troubles we are pounding on the door to G-d's very throne room, insisting on an audience and demanding mercy for our Mirele down on earth, alone, without her parents. And G-d will listen to us. We won't leave Him alone until he agrees that you deserve health, love and happiness.

Mirele, you'll wonder what your first two years were like. You'll wish you could remember. Let me remember for you right now, tenderly, on this piece of paper.

You like hot cereal in the morning, with lots of milk and sugar. Except that there is no milk and sugar now, none in the whole city. But I make you cereal anyway and you eat it with big smiles between every bite. Then you come ready for your nap, so I rock you, after putting the rocker where the sunlight will fall on it. I rock you until you fall asleep and then I put you in my bed. You sleep well there, you like my smell. What will you smell tomorrow night? Surely nobody will rock you tomorrow, not even in the shade. Oh G-d? I cannot do it! I will do it. For you, Mirele, so you will have at least a hope for life.

Mirele, do me a favour, after you've grown, after this dirty nightmarish war is over... I know there will be those who underplay the tragedies going on here every day. They will say, "A war is a war. It was just a war". Mirele, tell them about this agony! Tell them how you felt secure in my arms rocking you to sleep in the sunlight. Tell them how your father ran, one night, a year ago, to get you medicine, past sentries, while breaking the curfew. He risked his life to ease your pain, Mirele. And now the three of us are being torn apart. "Just a war"...?! Tell them, Mirele, that all wars in the world don't add up to the agony in my heart right now as I write this.

G-d it's 2am already. Only two more hours with my love, my baby, my life, my Mirele. I'm going to hold you now, Mirele, for two hours. Your father and I are going to wake you, feed you and tell you over and over how much we love you. You're barely two years old, but maybe, if G-d is good, maybe, you'll remember it and maybe you'll keep this letter until you're old enough to read it.

There will be bad times for you, Mirele, I know. But just think about me holding you, rocking you to sleep in the sunlight. Keep that sunlight in your heart always.

I love you. Your father loves you. May G-d help us all.

**Mama**

*Dear Readers*

*Miracles happen – my mother's letter stayed with me, sewn into my undershirt and I am getting old myself and have decided to share it with you. After almost fifty years of keeping it private, why did I translate it from the Yiddish and decide to share it with you now? A few reasons ...*

*Firstly, one doesn't hear much about the Holocaust anymore very much these days. There are even those who claim it was made up, not true, a brilliant Jewish ploy for sympathy. My mother asked me to remind you that it wasn't "just a war". It was a monstrosity.*

*Secondly, my mother's faith in G-d, even at that dreadful hour, never ceases to amaze me. Even though she was almost certain that she would soon die, as indeed she did, she believes firmly in G-d to whom she can turn both before and after her earthly life ends. This strengthens my faith and perhaps it will strengthen yours.*

*And lastly – I know I'm from a different generation. Nowadays I'm told, all mothers work. But sometimes I look out my window and see little children, just two years old. That's how old I was when my mother was forced to give me up to strangers. And I look out my window and see these two year olds cry because they want to stay with their mothers, but their mothers are putting them on the bus because they want to be free of them – and sometimes it doesn't seem right.*

*You mothers who are lucky enough to have babies – raise them too. Don't throw them out before they're ready. Don't leave them before they're ready. Go now. Rock them in the sunlight. For my mother.*

***Miriam bas Leiba***

*(In my mother's letter, she didn't leave her name, but I always think of her as Leiba – "Love". I'm lucky. Many of the children rescued with me don't even know their own names.)*

(This genuine document is reprinted by courtesy of Rabbi L.D. Sandler and Gila Sandler, Brooklyn, NY.)

Additional resources and information are available from the following websites:

Holocaust Educational Trust: [www.het.org.uk](http://www.het.org.uk)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Shoah Foundation Institute (Testimonies from survivors): [www.vhf.org](http://www.vhf.org)

Holocaust Memorial Day: [www.hmd.org.uk](http://www.hmd.org.uk)

# Personal Reflections

## **Aberdeenshire Council**

### *Kemnay Academy*

#### **Jean Irvine, Teacher**

It will take me a bit of time to actually process all that I have seen today. At Auschwitz the thing I will remember is the cabinets full of hair, shoes, personal belongings. I was particularly moved by the display of children's clothes, in particular, I will remember the ragged cardigan full of holes.

At Birkenau, the experience was different. The walk back to the bus, along the railway line, in the dark, in the extreme cold it is an experience you cannot imagine until you are there.

The visit has certainly added to my understanding of the Holocaust – I knew beforehand that Birkenau was big, but you realise its full extent when you walk through it. To be there and experience it adds another dimension. The extreme cold is something you cannot feel from a picture or a programme.

I possibly imagined beforehand that you would see horrific images or images of piles of bodies. We saw little of that. It is all about what you don't see.

Overall the trip was a fantastic experience and one which I vow never to forget. I have always felt strongly that every pupil that goes through my school knows about the Holocaust. The teaching and learning experience I can give them now is certainly enhanced.

## **Angus Council**

### *Carlogie Primary School*

#### **Alex Peggie, Teacher**

The enormity of the site and the magnitude of the consequences for both the inmates and us today.

The buildings, laid out in clinical order and purpose built for a process unknown to man.

The talk from Rabbi Marcus spoke out from the many photographs displayed in 'Canada' – people like everyone else murdered for what?

The messages about taking responsibility were clear and profound and leaves an unanswered question about oneself in that we need to ask ourselves 'what would I have done' and 'how do I know?' which is different from knowing what it is I would like to have done. In other words how do I protect the weak and persecuted? How do I stand up against immoral authority? It is also

true that this experience of the visit is far more significant than reading the literature or watching a film.

### *Monifeith High School*

#### **Hugh Hood, Teacher**

Clearly an exceptionally busy day. Auschwitz (1) was more like a museum but with some horrific exhibits, the mass of human hair, clothes, shoes and suitcases. Walking into the gas chamber and seeing the holes where the poison gas was administered was shocking. However, the gallows where Hoess died himself were a deserving punishment for such an evil man. Unfortunately many innocent people died on the same gallows.

Birkenau was unforgettable; its sheer scale, the entrance and infamous railway line. The snowy/frosty conditions gave a better idea of the conditions in which the prisoners had to live. The walk up to the crematoria to view where mass murders took place was moving.

The service conducted by the Rabbi was quite an experience, not surprisingly considering where it was set. Lighting candles in memory of the 1.3 million dead was a token of remembrance that we will not forget the terrible crimes committed here only 60 years ago.

The walk back to the bus emphasised the sheer scale of the camp – the barbed wire, towers etc. The depressing barracks where prisoners had to live after working all day without a decent meal.

The Jewish synagogue was a fitting place to visit as was the extremely hurried visit to the Jewish museum – very interesting looking at scenes which I had seen an hour before.

Overall a truly remarkable day, long (I was up at 4am) but certainly an unforgettable experience. I would certainly consider returning again and bringing S6 pupils with me.

Thanks very much for organising the trip.

## **Argyll & Bute Council**

### *Rothesay Academy*

#### **Gerry Kelley, Teacher**

The starkness and vastness of Birkenau had a big impact initially. The tower and entrance to Birkenau are well known images but to actually walk through the camp with these looming behind you creates a sense of cold dread that you are in a cold unfeeling place where emotions like love, joy and happiness cannot exist.

The interior of the huts had a numbing impact. Photographs do not really convey the reality of the sleeping and living conditions that had to be endured. In the cold it seems so difficult to contemplate how anyone could survive for more than a few days in such horrendous, primitive conditions.

Sharing this experience with others was important but it will take time to reflect and take it all in. The walk back along the railway line conjured up many terrible images in the imagination – of people arriving and families being separated.

Strangely, the photographic display of families in Birkenau had a very positive impact – images of people who had real and happy lives before the Holocaust and would be remembered in this way.

Lastly, I expected to be upset by what I saw, but experienced a feeling of coldness, despair and the enormity of what was done and dread that there exists the capacity in humans to treat other humans in this way. This was brought home by the remains of the gas chambers – the sheer scale of planning and engineering devoted to the attempt to eliminate a whole race of people.

### **David Maitland, Pupil**

Before arriving at Auschwitz I wasn't sure of how I would feel when I got there. I had a rough idea of what to expect, through pictures and survivors testimonies in books, but I still wasn't sure of exactly how I would feel, actually standing in the place itself.

There was a cold silence in both Auschwitz and Birkenau. An eeriness that was unique. As we walked around Auschwitz I got a sense of the ordeals the people in the camp went through. The visit gave me a better understanding of the sheer scale of the atrocities. When we arrived at Birkenau I was amazed by the size of the camp. I had no idea it was so big and there were so many prisoner barracks. Birkenau had an atmosphere even more haunting than that of Auschwitz 1. The constant silence meant you couldn't help but reflect on the information you were told about.

The trip has increased my understanding of the Holocaust and helped me realise that Auschwitz should be kept as a terrifying reminder of what went on during World War II.

### **Claire Young, Pupil**

From 1941 to 1945 a staggering 1,500,000 people were exterminated in Auschwitz and Birkenau. Many more were unaccounted for. Rabbi Barry Marcus stated that if we were to stand in silence for a minute for every life lost in the Holocaust then we would be standing in silence for 2 years. It was horrific to think that so many

people lost their lives just because they didn't fit Hitler's criteria of the Aryan race.

These people are just like you and I, innocent, harmless people. They were unaware and unsuspecting of the true horrors that lay ahead. Walking through the gates as I entered Auschwitz, or down a flight of stairs I just couldn't stop thinking about the thousands and thousands that had been here before me, if only for a short time to be gassed and cremated or to stay in the poor quality, insufficient barracks to be worked to death.

The mountains of shoes ranging from babies sandals to large men's boots was harrowing to see. It's not as much what I saw that shocked me, more my imagination, what was going through my mind, trying to picture the real terror and fear people went through looking at the shoes, wondering who they belonged to and what their personal story was.

Visiting Auschwitz and Birkenau today brought a tear to my eye, the shock of seeing piles and piles of human hair that had been shaved off from all those mothers, daughters and aunties. Imagine what it would have felt like if they had done this to your mother then killed her. Today I thought from the perspective of an Auschwitz prisoner, feelings like that cause a lot of hurt and pain to me and all I was doing was imagining.

But it did happen, and to so many people that didn't deserve it.

I'm glad I had the opportunity to go and visit the camps it is something that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Thank you to all who arranged and organised the trip it was very worth while.

### **Martin Slaven, Pupil**

On leaving this morning for Auschwitz, I felt a certain amount of dread but also felt great anticipation to what I was about to take part in.

The statistics and percentages given to you in the main Auschwitz camp are horrendous and rather than the sadness I expected I felt a great deal of numbness as the enormity for me was too great. I also felt a great deal of pity, firstly for the victims but then for the tormentors and Europe as a whole as what kind of human being would it take to be able to treat another in such a way.

The eerie silence that greeted us through the infamous gates of Birkenau was unexpected, and even though with friends you couldn't help feeling isolated and helpless.

Nothing that I have learned this far in my life compares to the scale of evil which went on in Auschwitz and I sincerely hope nothing ever does.

I have learned a lot today most of which I hope I will never forget.

### **Chris Kinloch, Pupil**

I didn't really know what to expect when going to Poland. When you see pictures of Auschwitz and Birkenau, you can't compare them to actually being there in person. The experience can be very emotional for most people, including myself, when you actually see the places where many innocent people lost their lives. The visit has made me understand more about the Holocaust. The thing that particularly stands out is the number of people that were killed in Auschwitz and Birkenau

### **Stephanie Bellshaw, Pupil**

I really didn't know what to expect when going to Auschwitz. At first I thought a day isn't long enough to cover so much but I definitely think we learned enough to understand the Holocaust. Sitting in a classroom looking at pictures and learning about the Holocaust is nothing compared to actually being there. When I saw the sheer size of Auschwitz-Birkenau I was gob-smacked. I never thought it was so big. Then when we were told about the treatment of the Jews that's when it hits you. Just thinking about how thousands of people were going to their death thinking they were only going for a shower makes me feel sick. How could someone be so cruel and inhuman? When walking along the tracks at Birkenau I thought about all of the Jews that had walked there over 60 years ago and tried to imagine how they would have felt but you can only imagine how they would have felt being taken away from their homes and separated from their families. As you walk around and discover more horrific facts you are simply overcome with emotion. The atmosphere at Birkenau also has an impact on you. Going to Auschwitz was one of the best experiences I've ever had and it's an experience that will stay with me forever and one I hope to share. I will never forget.

## **City of Edinburgh Council**

### ***St. Margaret's School***

#### **Sally Duncanson, Teacher**

There were many striking features about Auschwitz-Birkenau including the vast rail network serving the camp, the amount of hair from prisoners, the terrible conditions in Birkenau barracks and the crematoria and gas chambers. I felt glad to leave Birkenau and appreciated, due to the increasing cold, how much prisoners suffered in their inadequate clothing. I understood far more about the Holocaust as it affected Poland and Polish Jews – how ruthlessly and efficiently the extermination was carried out, and with cruelty, deception. How could man have done this to fellow

human beings just sixty years ago? The trip was well organised and met my expectations. I did not feel the camps were “commercialised” in any way; the atmosphere was respectful, signage subtle and informative, with a very good local guide.

### **Miriam Weibye, Pupil**

I was expecting to be affected and moved by the experience, but when I arrived it meant so much more. Seeing the cells in Block 11, and the samples of possessions left by the arrivals really brought the experience to life. It became a very vivid picture that really made the experience something that I learned a lot from. The feelings of horror that I felt on visiting crematorium 1 and the cells in Block 11, as well as most of Birkenau were extreme and really motivated me to try and make horrors known to other people in order that such a disaster never happen again. Even though the cold weather was a shock, I think that it made us relate to what the people must have gone through. Also, reading the personal experiences in the booklet I thought were very poignant, and very moving. I think that was the closest I came to tears all day. Being able to stop and have time to reflect and pray was welcome, and made me feel a little closer to what was happening. I was glad to have the chance to gather my thoughts.

As I go home, I am little apprehensive about sharing the experience. I know that I will never be able to convey those emotions that the visit brought out in me and that perhaps my friends won't understand. Nevertheless, I am very thankful that I, at least, had this wonderful opportunity to learn more about the Holocaust.

God Bless.

## **Clackmannanshire Council**

### ***Alloa Academy***

#### **Andrew Hunt, Teacher**

The Tuesday evening started well for me – my father was one of the soldiers (medical corps) that liberated Belsen. I was brought up with stories of what the camp was like and the things my father said they had to do (e.g. round up local people to get them to witness the atrocities, and in the end, move them, collect the dead bodies and put them in pits). So – to have an actual survivor there who may have been the very sort of person that my father came across was partly “spooky” but set a tone for impact on my mind that I was ready to appreciate.

Talking of spooky – the thing that got to me again and again was the photos of “then” and the photos I was

taking myself. It really got to me that I was standing often in the very spot of the photographers 60 – 65 years ago – yet I was seeing something peaceful and quiet, not the horrors of what actually happened then.

The one general point that I was very glad of, was that it was so cold – the snow gave the sense of what Birkenau especially was like, a sense of purity, but with a hard edge that a sunny summer's day wouldn't have given it. The cold also gave an icy sense of reality to what we were seeing in front of us. It had the effect of driving away anything resembling a sort of slushy or self-indulgent sentimentality that may get some observers who think that is the appropriate emotion to feel. It's something harder than that and I think the harshness of the conditions pushes the mind in the right direction.

Thanks for letting me come.

One last thing – arriving at Birkenau is just perfect – the blood red sun over the white snow – what could set up the paradox more clearly than that?

### **Alasdair Gordon, Pupil**

Before today I was ignorant to the scale of the operation which took place at Auschwitz-Birkenau. When I wake up tomorrow morning this will not be the case.

### **Iain Young, Pupil**

Well where to start? One has to take such things into consideration. The eerie barracks at Auschwitz I, so silent and spooky. You find it hard to find a sense of scale, one thing that helped was all of the hair stored in one room. Unbelievable. 1950kg approximately lets you know roughly the scale of the atrocity.

### **Alva Academy**

#### **Sarah Wilson, Pupil**

There are so many things that really hit me when I was at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I think the trip was arranged at the perfect time to understand the conditions these people went through. If the cold of winter could affect us so much with our layers of clothing it is horrible to imagine all those people in their thin pyjamas for a whole winter. And that's only one of the horrors!

Visiting Block 11 was particularly haunting. After reading and hearing about what went on in this part of Auschwitz I couldn't help but see my own idea of what happened played out before my eyes. I suppose that happened a lot today. The grim, dark interior of Block II really struck me and to find the wall where prisoners were shot ...

As much as I believe the Holocaust took place it did always seem like something an entire world away – something you saw on TV, in books. Actually being

there made it seem so much more real. As a person who has found themselves wrapped up in cotton wool and sheltered from the real ghastly side of human nature for most of the time, the excursion showed me just what humans can do. It's brought about my awareness that such an event is always possible again. As the Rabbi said, Iran wishes to obliterate Israel. I really do feel a moral and political obligation to use my experience in my judgement of world events and even events close to me.

The excursion really affected me and not only made me think of the matter in connection with my studies in history but even the dissertation topic I took for English. The idea that human beings are dual in nature. The idea that we are able to commit such terrible atrocities if we let our ruthless, cruel, selfish side take over. The idea that a civilised society can harness such uncivilised ideas is something that came to mind as I walked through the camps.

The excursion has left me rather speechless in a way. I'm speaking to people in my group about it but for the time being it's so difficult to put such an experience into words. It really makes me appreciate how Auschwitz survivors are able to share. So I do feel determined that I will use my experience beneficially, past those times when there are no longer any Holocaust survivors left.

As a person open to many religions, the Jewish religion touched me today. The man's prayer played to us in Block 27 was so moving and upsetting and I don't think I'll ever forget it.

The excursion has developed my attitude and ideas to history as a whole and the endless persecution of people because they are different. It's something I'll not only carry with me when I study history at university but in my personal and social life too.

I am really, really grateful to be given such an opportunity and want to thank all the organisers and people involved for creating such an opportunity.

#### **Thomas Litchfield, Pupil**

It is quite difficult to reflect on the experience of visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau so soon after the event. I have a great passion for history and enjoy reading up on historical events. Before the trip I knew it would differ greatly from reading, or watching a documentary or pictures or anything like that. However when actually arriving at the camps seeing with your own eyes the enormous amount of barbed wire, feeling the snow crunch as you walk down the old railway line, even breathing and smelling the air it's so difficult to take in. Even now I still cannot believe I was actually there looking up at the sky thinking about the prisoners who'd done the same but knowing there was no way out, I simply cannot comprehend.

Significant points were the displays in Auschwitz. It makes the experience more personal to see somebody's shoes or glasses and suitcases with their names on them. Probably the most memorable moment from the trip was seeing Birkenau for the first time. It was the sheer size of the place that affected me, rows and rows of Jewish belongings which was shocking. The temperature was another important factor of the experience. I was wearing three layers of clothing and I still felt the cold and you can't help but think of what the prisoners went through, it's outrageous.

To all those who organised the event I am forever grateful for the experience as I feel it is an extremely worthwhile event and it is difficult to express my gratitude.

## *Lornshill Academy*

### **Lauren Clydesdale, Pupil**

My one-day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau was an absolutely amazing experience. I already had a good knowledge of the Holocaust, having studied it in my Standard Grade History class at school. However, this knowledge did not help me prepare for what I witnessed at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Actually seeing it for myself gave me a much fuller knowledge of what really went on in the camps, rather than just reading facts and figures from a textbook. Being at the camps highlighted the extent of the devastation that occurred there so many years ago. Many sights had in fact hurt me – the piles of victims' shoes, bags, glasses and even the hair of the women who were murdered in the gas chambers. Seeing these upset me, as I knew that these items came from innocent people. Items of clothing from very young children upset me even deeper, as it hurts me to know that they hardly had a life. Knowing the poor conditions that the prisoners had to endure made me realize the horror that they went through whilst living in the camp. The treatment of the prisoners was terrible, and I can't even begin to imagine how it felt to go through it. I have a huge amount of respect for those who survived and sympathise with them as I know it must haunt them, even now.

The eerie atmosphere is still alive there – something important that I noticed at both camps. There is complete silence – no birds singing or anything cheery like that. A pin dropping would be easily heard. A feeling of unease came over me whilst standing in the gas chambers and the crematoria, as that is where the mass killing of the people (mainly Jews) took place. The sad, sombre atmosphere could be felt.

I was deeply moved and touched by the Rabbi's prayers and his speech on the Auschwitz situation. He explained that people easily forget about Auschwitz, even though it reflects on some of the horrific things

that happen in the world today. Perhaps Auschwitz was on a larger scale. I was therefore honoured to light a candle for those who perished many years ago. I wanted to show that I'm never going to forget. Leaving the camp, I was relieved to know that I could. However, I was saddened to think about those who could not escape so easily.

### **Daniel Tierney, Pupil**

I believe the pre-visit testimony of Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor, Ernest Levy, provided the perfect introduction to the experience. His vivid memories which he kindly conveyed to us came alive as soon as we entered the camp. Although the trip as a whole provided a deeply moving experience for me, both the display of suitcases (which bore the names of prisoners!) and the collection of photographs of the inmates had the greatest impact on me. It was at these points that the realisation that those who died in the camp were real human beings (with names and faces) set in. I also think that the harsh weather which we endured for a couple of hours added to the experience. The visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau turned out to be very similar to my expectations – the view of Auschwitz from the watch tower was almost identical to the image I had in my head. I particularly found the guides (both in the camps and on the bus) extremely helpful – their efforts have greatly deepened my knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Holocaust.

## **Dumfries & Galloway Council**

### *Wallace Hall Academy*

#### **Sharon McLean, Teacher**

This was a very moving experience and “seeing” is very different from “reading”.

The exhibitions in Auschwitz I were very emotional. The displays of cases, pots and pans etc brings home that ‘ordinary’ people were involved in this. The displays of photos also reinforce this aspect.

The size of Birkenau needs to be seen to be believed.

Congratulations on a very successful trip – the first of many!”

#### **Joanna Newbigging, Pupil**

I will never forget my trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I learnt a lot of new information about the Holocaust. Some of the pictures I have in my mind I will never forget. The horror that so many people faced in those awful camps should not be forgotten. I don't know what I expected from the experience but nothing can prepare you for what you see and learn. How anyone

can do that to other human beings I will never understand.

These days should continue to be organised so that the past is not forgotten and so that the same circumstances never arise again.

Thanks.

### **Andrew Waugh, Pupil**

I found the experience very informative. As I left the camp I was shocked at the scale of the mass killings. I feel the education of the Holocaust is the best way to prevent any atrocity on that huge scale. The main part which affected me was seeing the huge rooms full of hair, shoes and luggage and finding out that this was a small fraction of the goods plundered from the Jews. I think going to Auschwitz is a lot better than books and documentaries although you may not get all the facts. The experience brings the stories to life, seeing what is left of the camp.

### **Matthew Lowry, Pupil**

Today I became distinctly aware of the human side of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Before I came on this trip I was only really aware of the statistics, the facts and figures of how many were captured and killed. But today it hit me that these were real people, people just like me and my family. The personal photos taken from luggage and displayed at Birkenau really reinforced this feeling.

Also, I realised the cruelty of humanity. One thing that really hit me was the wee baby shoes. These tiny shoes so fragile and they seemed so out of place in the camp of death. The thought that people could do such an atrocious act to such an innocent and harmless child or baby is something I found very hard to deal with.

Today I felt uneasy. Not just uneasy at the mass killing, the brutal slaughter of human beings but also the fact that today I was a tourist of death. The Holocaust should not be forgotten yet this scene of phenomenal atrocities is now a museum and I personally felt a moral struggle going on inside. On one side, the tourist, desperate to take home memories on film on the other my conscience wanting to respect and pay my homage to the fallen. This internal tug of war was only felt at Auschwitz. Birkenau seemed a lot more real. The sheer size of the camp and the efficiency of the German slaughterhouse was something that shocked us. Murder was turned into a clinical routine. Walking back in the dark, surrounded by mist, I felt that there was something very ominous about the place, something eerily unnerving that made me feel uneasy.

Today my life changed.

Today I went to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

## **East Renfrewshire Council**

### ***Barrhead High School***

#### **Linda Donaghy, Pupil**

From a very early age I have been taught, about the Second World War and Hitler's Nazi regime. I have read many stories of how he and his followers murdered over six million Jews during the war. Despite this, I did not realise the enormity of what happened even though I had read the figures many times.

Seeing Auschwitz-Birkenau was a mind blowing experience which is fairly difficult to describe. I do not understand why I was so shocked by what I saw because I had been told all of these things before but somehow looking at dozens and dozens of barracks lined in countless rows, seeing the hair and clothes of the deceased and observing the gas chambers and crematoriums in person made it real to me.

I was immediately filled with emotions: anger, sadness, hate but most of all fear. Fear that in a few years time it could all happen again, if we let it. I realised when I was there that this was the whole reason for the visit. So that we, the younger generation, will carry on the fight to sustain democracy and equality on the earth. We must not allow ourselves to be sucked in by extremists like Hitler who believe that any one race is better and worth more than another.

Today life is good – it's fantastic in comparison to what the Jews, Gypsies, Soviets etc went through during Hitler's reign in Germany but I fear we do not appreciate everything we have as much as we should. To keep our country the way it is we have to stay neutral and united with one another if any of the future generations are to have even a small hope of survival.

### ***Eastwood High School***

#### **Alison Bell, Pupil**

The first thing that struck me about Auschwitz is how normal it looks, almost like a little village. It certainly shows no signs of being a mass killing machine. However, inside the blocks tells a very different story. You can actually smell the smell of death in the punishment cells, my lungs filled with air when we came back up, it is just indescribable. The saddest thing of all is the exhibition of clothes, hair and shoes that have been recovered from Auschwitz. I was taking pictures of it all but suddenly stopped when I came across a little cardigan that must have belonged to a baby no more than two months old. It touched me so much that I could not even cry as it was just so awful. It is the sheer size of Birkenau that is upsetting and again the little things. The Nazis really thought of everything, they had slanted the bunk beds so that they could fit

more into the barracks. I thought, how can people even think this never mind sit and plan it out. It is truly evil.

I feel that everyone should be taught about this, even the little details such as the ones I have already mentioned. This is because it happened in Europe and could quite easily happen again. Genocide is not a thing of the past but is very much an issue of the present. If we teach children about it then we will have a generation of people that are aware of the facts and who can make sure that an end is seen to this evil. We are lucky enough to be born in a democracy where we can propel our government to act. I feel this quote sums it up:

'For evil to triumph all that is needed is for the good to do nothing at all'.

Thank you Jim for this opportunity.

### ***Mearns Castle High School***

#### **Ailsa McNaughton, Teacher**

The silence and the eerie light of Birkenau is really all you need to feel to know your view of life will be changed by this experience.

I still will never understand why or how all this unnecessary cruelty came to take place, but what has changed is that I now know the need that exists for every person, young and old, to experience first-hand the air, sound and ghosts of Auschwitz. Doing this will ensure that people do not forget what went on, long after the last survivor has died.

Thank you so much for granting us this opportunity.

#### **Jim McKenna, Teacher**

No matter what you have read or watched about the Holocaust it could not prepare you for the day. The experience will live with me, the total disbelief that murder on this scale could be organised in this way.

It is hard to believe just how clinical, cruel and inhuman that other people could be. When I saw the bunk beds at a slope so that more people could be forced into one bunkhouse. This symbolised to me just how evil these people were. Evil and hate had taken over their lives.

The personal effects – the shoes, the glasses, the pictures, the hair, the clothes – will live in my imagination for ever. When I speak about the Holocaust I will see these pictures in my head which will allow me to speak with real emotion and passion. I need to be one of the many that go out of my way to stop this happening again.

Like everyone else on this trip I will need time to reflect but can I just thank you for giving me this opportunity today.

#### **Ysabelle Del Monte, Pupil**

The total silence in Birkenau was eerie and added to the experience, I was horrified by the rooms full of “booty”, the ordinary objects that belonged to people were shocking to see as they were just lying discarded piles and piles of them. When you learn about the Holocaust you get numbers thrown at you “6 million Jews were murdered”. I could never relate to these numbers yet seeing the shoes piled on top of each other sort of gave me some sort of perspective.

I don't know how anyone could have survived more than a couple of hours in the bitter cold, I couldn't even bring myself to take off my gloves. I couldn't imagine having only the thin pyjamas on. I doubt I would have survived.

#### **Michael Mair, Pupil**

The experience of my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau is one that I shall never forget. It is something that will haunt me for the rest of my life. As I left Birkenau I couldn't help but feel thankful that I was able to leave. Standing on the site where so many were needlessly killed was something that touched me deeply. I couldn't imagine the pain and fear faced by those who came to the camps as prisoners. Neither could I imagine the courage that the prisoners had, to be able to survive in those conditions for years at a time is unbelievable.

It was in coming to Auschwitz that I was able to see the horrific treatment of those who were kept alive to work, the barbaric dehumanisation shown in Auschwitz is unacceptable to any member of the human race and I find myself wondering how the Nazi guards would have been able to carry out such treatment and still have gone home to a family or held respect within their community.

The ghostly silence was also very ominous as it seems the entire camp is void of life. I couldn't imagine a plant growing or an animal making its home there, it appeared as if all of Auschwitz was dead.

The image I am left with as I travel home is pictures from the Jewish persecution museum. One is of the Jewish men being hung, the star of David on their clothes marking them as Jews – their only crime being that they were Jewish. I found this level of religious intolerance to be shocking as here was proof of the dead staring at me. The other pictures were both from mass graves, one being of babies who were dead – destroyed before they had a chance to experience the world. And the other of someone so malnourished that they had become a skeleton with flesh. This picture horrified me as I had heard the term where people were described as skeletons, but here was the picture of what they truly looked like – it was a picture that made me gag.

I want to thank all those involved in organising this trip. It has shaped me as a person, and I know now that I cannot with a clean conscience ever allow something of this nature to ever happen again. Thank you.

### **Anna Martin, Pupil,**

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to have such an experience. Nothing can prepare you for what you see in those camps. At Auschwitz, I felt more affected by seeing the hair, belongings, shoes etc as I find it unbelievable that these were taken from people with knowledge they were going to die – they had lost all sense of dignity and identity. It is this pain and suffering, not simply the deaths, that I find most atrocious. By seeing the birth dates of children impresses how important family is. It is with reading the stories in the leaflet that I feel able to put myself in their shoes, what if my brother and sister were separated, if I had to watch my mother and father walk to their death in the gas chamber unknowingly. It reinforces how much I take family, a home, basic food for granted.

At Birkenau I was overwhelmed by the immensity of the camp. The scale of the camp was truly unbelievable and I found it unimaginable that people could survive such cold temperatures when I myself was frozen at –7oc. Whilst standing in the freezing wooden barracks, by seeing the stone toilets and the crooked beds you could imagine the thousands of people crowded, dying and also the infection crawling around.

Whilst walking down the main track I tried to imagine arriving in the pitch dark to be beaten, sent either to death or, possibly worse, to the barracks where you would suffer a long painful death. This was the place where millions of families were separated, which is so difficult to comprehend with a family of your own.

The humiliation of stripping, being shaved, robbed of your belongings is heart-breaking, especially I feel for the mothers whose children they had to watch suffer.

One particular moment that I feel captured the atmosphere of Birkenau was when myself, and two other friends were leaving the registration block having to walk back through the woods in silence. It was this wall of eerie silence that I found so intensely disconcerting, and horrifying as we passed the crematoriums, that signified the deaths of so many which was the result of such pain and suffering. In my opinion, the worst atrocity of humanity the world has ever seen.

It was an intensely emotional yet memorable trip and I look forward to sharing it with my peers.

With the Rabbi's prayer it was as though you could feel the souls of those who died in the surrounding

atmosphere being freed. An extremely powerful speech.

### **Claire Wilson, Pupil**

What I found the most profoundly affecting was the room full of hair. I now can contemplate the struggle that was involved in merely staying alive and as a result, have tremendous respect and admiration for all those survivors. I loved seeing the Christian carvings in Block 11; they are a true testament that God is there, even in the most horrific situations

### ***St. Luke's High School, Woodfarm High School, St. Ninian's High School***

#### **Claire Louise Howell, Martin Speirs, Pamela Love, Pupils**

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Auschwitz as we found it not only informative but deeply moving. The enormity of the camp highlighted the horrific acts that were carried out daily by the Nazi Regime.

The conditions the victims suffered were appalling and completely unnecessary. What stood out for us was the total disregard for human life, including torturing, fictitious trials and public humiliation.

We feel it is important for young people to carry the torch for justice and peace, remembering the victims of the Holocaust.

### ***Williamwood High School***

#### **Emily Coyle, Pupil**

We all learn about History and the war especially the 2nd World War and in particular the Holocaust throughout our school life, however what I have seen and learnt today on my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau is something that can never be taught.

To actually witness the remains of such a monstrous and unjustified genocide brings a shocking reality to what happened only 60 years ago, to people no different to us today.

To try and explain what I felt throughout my visit is incredibly hard, it is a very personal experience which I am sure everyone reacts differently to.

Despite being in a group of over 100 people, at times I found myself feeling incredibly lonely and asking myself why? How could this have happened and why wasn't it stopped before 6 million innocent people, 98% of whom were Jewish and lost their life purely on that basis, were so barbarically slaughtered.

Personally, I do not practise a particular religion, I have always believed there must be a God somewhere

looking after us, and although I have no immediate personal connections with anyone unfortunate enough to have been murdered or have their life ruined by the Holocaust, at some points in the day I found myself questioning his existence after all. It did however give me a lot of respect for those who despite the torture and cruelty looked to God and to their faiths for help with hope and belief, this is something I am sure I could not have done.

The shocking images of piles of human hair and endless amounts of children shoes, seeing these people's belongings was almost like proof it made it real. It also made me think a lot. Unnecessary genocides like the Holocaust can never happen again. By visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau and sharing experiences with as many as possible, I am sure people will agree and do all possible to prevent it happening in the future. Our future. This was a cruel act of sheer evil which has no belonging in our society today and forever.

## **Fife Council**

### ***Balwearie High School***

#### **Mhairi Liddell, Pupil**

Today happened so quickly – but at the same time it doesn't seem like it has only been a day. To look back on it and identify one particular moment that moved me beyond belief, it is impossible. The whole day was a dream, but a dream that was more like a nightmare, but we experienced nothing compared to all the persecuted people. However, there are a few vivid moments that horrify me, that make me feel terribly sick; the many photographs at Birkenau, looking at them puts individual faces to the horror pictures we see, the Jews and many others became individuals, each of those faces showed that the person was happy and loved, there was laughter in their eyes – but comparing those photos with the ones taken in concentration camps. Where it was extremely difficult to tell one person from the next, there was no more laughter in their eyes, but instead death, despair and loneliness, they were no longer happy and loved but terrified and abused. How can any human being inflict such monstrosities on another?

When you saw all the hair, glasses, shoes and luggage at Auschwitz it made it more realistic and brought home to me how many people were actually murdered. The thing that did move me emotionally, the thing that evoked so much anger and hatred was when you saw all the piles of artificial limbs, crutches and back braces. How could anyone even begin to dehumanise these people – put them through such humiliation before they were brutally murdered? How could they do experiments on these human beings who were just like

themselves but with different origins while they were still alive? While dehumanising the persecuted persons they were making themselves less human, unrecognisable to future generations because of the monstrosities they committed.

I bet going through everyone's minds today was "I would have done something to stop it all", I wouldn't have stood back and stayed silent. But is that true? Would I, or for that matter anyone on today's trip, have stood up and said "No, you can't do that, it's wrong"? Do we do it in our lives already? Do we intervene when people are getting picked on? Do we stop groups of people being discriminated against? Do we know where the line is between right and wrong? I think the thing I got most out of today is something very simple, a small simple action, such as words, can stop people being terrorized, at least for the short term until you can get more back-up to stop it permanently. I know I, and many others, have realised that we can never let anything like the Holocaust happen in our lifetime. It happening once was once too often.

I intend to share this terrific experience with anyone who is prepared to listen, because it is only in identifying our mistakes, the mistakes of the human race, that we can rectify them and make our world a place where anyone, no matter what their religion, ethnic origin, their way of life is, can enjoy their full potential.

#### **Louise Elizabeth Brown, Pupil**

During the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, I think one of the most poignant things I noticed was the footprints in the snow. I just noticed that all the people in the camp, whether they were immediately gassed or not, everyone who experienced that place (both the camps we visited, but I noticed it most at Birkenau) would have left their footprints on those paths in the snow at some point, even if nothing else of them was left undestroyed by the Nazis. Now all the people who visit and tread the same paths are leaving footprints above theirs but there is one crucial difference, at one point the modern footprints will turn round and will lead out of the camp when so many people never could. I felt grateful to be able to exit the place.

I never really expected that the camps would be quite so big. I was just amazed that they must have completely crushed the spirit of the people there on such a large scale. I don't think I can explain this at all. Nothing to think for, nothing to hope for, dream or aim for. No mental or physical escape.

At Auschwitz, I found the mounds of personal belongings horrific to see. The pile of hair had a strange effect. I looked at my own hair and imagined some of it being cut off and laid in that room. Then it

would become indistinguishable from all the rest. I cannot imagine how many people are represented there and something, once so personal and individual to them, perhaps an identifying feature of a person, could just be taken away and all piled together so they are lost among the mounds. With the shoes also, each different shoe may be a different person. I imagined taking off one of my shoes and putting it with the others, I guess you try to imagine what it must be like to lose all you have, to lose your identity and freedom and ultimately every part of you that you would ever call life. I wouldn't know where to start.

All these people now actually seem so distant from me because of what they had to experience. I can't quite find a word to describe that feeling. It could perhaps be admiration for them. Maybe I'm in awe of what strength they must have had to summon from the very depths of their being. It could be pride that human beings can stand such torment but, I think I'm getting closer to it now perhaps, I don't really feel worthy to be in such a place and see how remarkably people could survive and still face a morning and just live there.

So how do I feel now? I guess it's a mixture of feeling sick, exhausted, shocked and sad. These two camps seem to display the strength that human beings can conjure but at the same time the effects of brutality a little of which I believe is in every person and if given the chance it will be able to consume. There's the warning. They were painful places to be – it is just so close to us in time yet it still doesn't sound real for this world but it was just too close for me, some of it.

### **Anna Clifford, Pupil**

I had an amazing experience at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I think what I was seeing took a while to sink in because we were moving around Auschwitz so fast that it was hard to feel the intensity of emotion at every point. I kept wanting to hang back and take everything in for a few more minutes. Especially the gas chamber with we seemed to zoom round. I could have spent a lot longer soaking up the atmosphere and just realising the awful job that was done there and how the prisoners must have felt.

The front gate was surprisingly small and inconspicuous for such a large place. I think seeing the tall trees lining the lanes made the place very distinctive. It was slightly unexpected to see so many trees as I did not expect to see thriving nature in a place so full of death. I thought the small wooden plaques with the black number written on them were strangely interesting in their simplicity. I think it was the fact that these simple numbers didn't give anything away about what went on inside. So impersonal as well. I felt strong despair when we saw the courtyard which contained the Death Wall, just imagining the atrocities that went on

and being able to identify where they happened. I found it interesting to see the difference between the windows of one building to the left with barricaded windows so that they could not see the shooting; and the barred windows of the infamous Block 11. I found the cells very intimidating and terrifying.

The magnitude of what actually went on was only really felt when I saw the millions of personal belongings – suitcases, glasses, brushes and shoes in particular and it really hit home. The women's hair was a bit of a shock as well – especially that it was made into fabric! I was really moved by the little ceremony held by the Rabbi in the barracks and the psalm was so haunting, it rang in my ears for the walk back through Auschwitz. It really helped me to understand the pain which really went on there.

Birkenau was fascinating. Seeing the enormity of the site from the watchtower was amazing. I was shocked by the appalling condition of the barracks with only one plank of wood thickness. Seeing the rows of wooden bunks, I felt in awe of anyone who survived this place. I cannot even begin to comprehend how many people would have been crushed into such a little space. One thing that really struck me was seeing the place where people would be selected for life or death. Standing in the spot was frightening. Seeing a photo of people standing feet away from where we were who had been sentenced to death and had no idea was so unbelievable. I can't express how it felt. Photos and actual belongings are things that really speak to me personally, and make me feel the greatest emotion.

At the end, seeing the photo walls of happy people, who went unsuspecting to their death, brought a tear to my eyes. I think everything actually made more sense when I actually saw those innocent smiling people. It was shocking. The atmosphere as the day became darker and the mist rose from the snow and clouded everything around in areas so lonely and empty. The loneliness people must have felt must have been so overwhelming. I thought the ceremony on top of the gas chamber was so respectful and peaceful, and there was a great atmosphere of unity within the whole group which felt special, that we had shared such an important moment in all of our lives. I thought seeing the ruins of the gas chamber would finally make my emotions flow, but I don't think the impact has really sunk in yet. I am glad that we could leave individual candles so we could leave a bit of our love, peace and hope for the future with that commemorative flame.

### ***Inverkeithing High School***

#### **Siobhan Macdonald, Pupil**

After today's trip I now truly believe that to fully understand what life was like under Nazi Germany you

have to see it for yourself. You have to see the buildings, smell the smells and stand beside the ruins. Today brought to life all things I'd read in textbooks, heard from teachers, seen on TV and reported in the news and it was an eye opening experience. I now feel quite passionately about this topic and will make sure that my friends, family and peers know what a tragedy this time was and how today's events have changed the way I look at things. I feel that it's now my duty to tell people who perhaps don't know what it was like and how it is something to be remembered. Today has changed my opinion on the Holocaust and it's something I'll never forget.

## **Glasgow City Council**

### *Drumchapel High School*

#### **Bernadette McKenna, Teacher**

I have two abiding memories of the visit:

- The walk through Auschwitz and the personal effects gathered by the S.S. The walk down the passage which had glass displays full of mountains of shoes on both sides was incredibly moving. To recognise the numbers of people involved but also the range of people; men, women, children, rich, poor. Shoes which were taken for granted but which symbolised all the lives lost.
- To walk along the railway line and turn back for the first time, as the darkness fell and the mist descended, then the greater appreciation of how absolutely bleak, desolate and isolated the camp was hit home. A clear image of the trains arriving, the selections, the walk under watch from the gun towers. The temperature of -7 degrees simply served to emphasise how anyone could have survived. Everything around offered little chance of escape – woods/watch towers/barbed wire – where could they escape to?

I am very pleased that the students chosen have appreciated the visit as an opportunity of a lifetime. It is one they have genuinely understood in all the complexity and emotional depth involved.

The pre-meeting which also had the survivor of Auschwitz, Ernest Levy, was amazing. To hear the raw emotion/passion sixty years on from someone who survived Auschwitz first hand was memorable. Now, having visited the camps, the question remains “How could people find the strength to survive ...”

#### **Jennifer Cunningham, Pupil**

It is difficult to put into words how it feels to have visited Auschwitz-Birkenau so soon after your first visit, to gather your thoughts and to have the ability to express your opinions.

There have been many moments which have stuck in my mind and always will forever. I will always remember the mountains of shoes from men, women to small children's shoes, and the rows upon rows of hair, particularly a perfect plaited ponytail. It makes you think of the evilness which took place at that time and how human beings can possibly dehumanise innocent Jews so carelessly and so easily. How could they go on living with that memory?

Something I know I will never forget is the eerie atmosphere and sense of death which creeps around the camp.

From this memorable experience I have taken a much better understanding of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the importance of carrying on these horrific but important memories to share with others, to let others know of the horrors of Auschwitz-Birkenau

#### **Karina Duncanson, Pupil**

When standing alongside the railway lines in Birkenau, it was at that moment, when I was standing facing the gatehouse, I felt that the awful past events were being played out in my mind. I felt as though I was a spectator on the platform, watching Jewish men, women and children being deported. I had a sense of insecurity, I felt trapped in the concentration camp.

My experience has made me think a lot. When I'm learning about the Holocaust in school, you can feel for the Jews but it's not until today that I have truly recognized the pain and humiliation those innocent people suffered. I only hope I can explain to my family and friends exactly what it felt like to be standing on a platform of true evil.

Hopefully, nothing like this awful event will happen again and the families of the Jewish people killed and tormented will be able to shape their view and feelings as well and help many more people understand what I have today.

### *Council Education Services*

#### **Allan Orr**

My experience of Auschwitz built up slowly. The early narrative by the guide was factual and had the effect of sanitising a horrific event. However, as the group moved on to view the personal effects of the people brought there – the hair, the shoes, the suitcases, the brushes – it became very humanised and a realisation of the horror began to develop.

Visiting Birkenau the first impression was of the vastness – the huge scale of the killing machine. The sun was setting and as darkness fell and mingled with the mist the feeling of doom and unease grew. What had the people suffered – had they prayed for a quick

end, had their spirit been sucked from them by this colossal act of inhumanity. All these feelings were encapsulated when having walked along the railway track towards the crematorium, I looked back and saw the lines converging in the distance at the tower entrance to the camp which was beginning to be enveloped in the mist. This brought home the terrible atrocities committed here by a cold hearted regime which dehumanised the perpetrators. I feel that such places must be kept open to ensure that the story is told. Future generations must remember this terrible act of ‘man’s inhumanity to man.’

Going back into Krakow I began to get more of an understanding of the effects of ‘the final solution’. I found it hard to comprehend that a Jewish population of around 3.5 million in Poland pre war had virtually disappeared and that their remains lay in ashes where we had just come from.

## ***Kelvinside Academy***

### **Joanna Carswell, Teacher**

Having visited Auschwitz-Birkenau before (in the Summer months) I knew it was an important thing to see for yourself. Being a history teacher, I felt it was important for the pupils to witness as well.

What got to me on the day were two things –

One – the enormous sense of purpose by the children on the flight and the feeling that this was an important thing to do, even if it was difficult and that they were on a “mission”, set by Ernest Levy, to tell others of this awful place.

Two – the way the pupils reacted to Auschwitz and were affected by it. They were respectful, reflective and dignified throughout the day.

I was profoundly affected by the way the names were on the suitcases and the way the people were told to remember their peg number because they would need to get their clothes back ... of course they never did. It’s not just the fact that millions of Jewish people died, it’s the fact that they were duped into believing they would be okay. Their whole everything was taken from them, their belongings, their dignity, their hope, their family – everything that made them who they were. It makes me so angry that this could happen.

The time of the year also made this visit more vivid ... the freezing temperatures and snow on the ground gave us the tiniest insight into the conditions at Birkenau ... being told by the guide what else they had to live with was upsetting to even imagine.

There was a sadness at Birkenau – a feeling of isolation and desperation, it was tangible in the air and was felt by all present. Especially when we trudged back in the dark

to the buses along the railway line after the service. All cold, all with our own thoughts of those who had suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis. We were leaving that desolate place and going back to our families ... most of those who passed through the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau were not so lucky.

### **Brendan Farrelly, Teacher**

Acre upon acre of desolate, unwanted, unloved land. Row upon row of wooden huts. This is what I saw as I surveyed the vast expanse of snow covered land which is Birkenau. I fully understood the naming of the place; I spotted many Birch trees standing isolated in this wasteland. Any resemblance to any romantic kind of reality ended there. Although I felt isolated in such a huge area, I could picture a mass of huddled, frightened bodies being herded around this death camp. I could attempt to feel the icy cold which must have chilled their emaciated frames. I could attempt to share the fear, desperation and disbelief which they must have felt in a hell hole with no hope. I was surrounded by people; students, teachers and other individuals, but I felt utterly alone with my thoughts. How could this have happened? How could people now possibly even dare to pretend that this hadn’t happened? I could not get over the size of Auschwitz II, so how could people who lived in the vicinity in the 1940s pretend that they did not know what was going on? I had always despised Holocaust denial but an anger raged in me now as I viewed this place, where thousands had perished, because they dared to be Jewish. It struck me that for many death was a welcome relief in this place, where humiliation, degradation, malnutrition and deprivation amounted to everyday life.

The sheer size of the place, the bitter cold, the feeling of utter despair and despondency; that fellow humans could do this to other men, women and children, fathers, brothers, sisters, daughters, sons and mothers. How could mankind do this to mankind?

### **Kirstin Klimowicz, Pupil**

To be honest I didn’t know what to expect from this trip to Auschwitz. I had so many unanswered questions I didn’t know where to start. I stood under the archway in the entrance to Auschwitz I – “Arbeit Macht Frei” – “Work Brings Freedom”. It was only later that I truly took in the meaning of that broken promise. As we walked through blocks 4–11 I found it hard to feel any emotion – everything hit you so suddenly I didn’t know how to react. The one thing that hit me hard were the baby clothes and the children’s shoes – it seems wrong to think that someone could do that to innocent lives. Being such a rushed tour it was only until later on the plane journey it all hit me – it just seemed so unreal, so hard to believe that anything like this could ever happen in this world.

When we arrived in Birkenau I could tell this tour was going to make a great impact on me. There was an eeriness about the place – so silent, so still. The train track leading through the gate. I automatically tried to put myself in the prisoners shoes – going through that gate with thousands more being separated from your loved ones – maybe knowing that you will never see them again. I stood there freezing – even with my countless amounts of layers on – looking in the different buildings wondering how they coped with such extreme temperatures in cheap pyjamas, while I stood there freezing whilst all wrapped up. At the prayer/memorial service standing in complete darkness I realised how lonely and isolated and abandoned people must have felt. As the horn echoed through the darkness everything fell into place. It was nothing like people had made it out to be – it's definitely a thing you have to personally experience yourself to get the full impact of the awful mass murders.

### **Felicity Shand, Pupil**

It was an amazing experience, which I am very thankful of having.

I never expected it to be like that; I feel that Auschwitz is a place that you must experience for yourself, so you can feel the atmosphere of this place.

Walking about in Auschwitz-Birkenau in the snow, freezing cold, looking at the row after row of bunkers is something which will never leave me.

My understanding of the Holocaust has greatly developed, and I am deeply horrified at what went on. I feel that we must go out of our way to tell others and never let something as terrible as this happen again.

### **Jennifer McGachy, Pupil**

For me, I did not expect Auschwitz-Birkenau to be that terrifying. It is very important for no one to forget what happened. To be ripped apart from your family and watch them be murdered is mentally scarring and a feeling of complete emptiness. To think thousands of Jews had walked where I had and was murdered moments later is horrifying to think, let alone actually being there 60 years ago. The silence of the courtyards as I walked by sent shivers up my spine thinking of the screams that once came from the chambers. So many innocent people were murdered by heartless humans. Even the methods of torture was disgusting, to think men/soldiers had sat down and thought about the worst way to murder men, women, pregnant women and children. This experience was a real 'eye-opener' and makes you realise all the 'standard' things in life we take for granted. I do believe everyone should know exactly what went on and learn by it so another disaster like this will not happen again.

I heard many stories of what happened, but it's completely different when you're there, standing in the courtyard where once lay a pile of bodies. An amazing experience, one which I'll never forget.

### **Euan Carrick, Pupil**

Seeing Auschwitz-Birkenau in person is something I'll never forget. Previously I had seen the camp many times on TV, but you are not able to get a feeling of how big the place actually is. Also watching on TV gave me the impression that it is far away and couldn't have possibly happened in Scotland. However, going there and back in a day brought it home to me. In fact it's only a 2½ hour flight away, that's nothing compared to the size of the world.

On the flight to Krakow Rabbi Barry Marcus explained that we would feel emotional as we walked around the camps – I didn't. At the time I thought I had a heart of stone, but looking back I realise I don't. There were so many things to see at once it's hard to take it all in at the time. But now I am able to feel these emotions that were absent on the day.

Especially walking round Birkenau in temperatures which seemed to me to be like –10oC Even with 3 layers on I was still frozen, but I didn't feel like I could complain. As people back in 1944 would have hardly any clothes on and experience even tougher conditions. And then I realized people lived in that camp for over a year. How did they manage to survive? After all I was there for less than 6 hours and finding it hard to cope in the conditions and I could expect to go back home where I was warm and there would be plenty of food and the security to know I would wake up alive the next day. These people didn't, they had no food (they received 1500 calories per day, you need 2000 just to stay alive), the huts they slept in were freezing in winter and roasting in summer (so disease was rife) and they were made to work to their deaths or be sent to the gas chambers. People woke up and expected to die and that is a thought I never want to experience.

### **Abbey Pettigrew, Pupil**

The moment that the whole experience hit me was when we were in the gas chambers in Auschwitz, our guide told us 10,000 people had died in this room, I got that tingly feeling up my spine. The realisation that I was standing on the grave of 10,000 innocent people. Furthermore when in Birkenau, entering the room with all the photos of the Jewish people before the war, was very emotional. Everybody is the same, we are all human beings, but these Jews were deprived of life.

I don't really know what to expect, I had seen "Schindler's List" but didn't expect it to be the same. The pictures that will remain in my memory forever are the "Arbeit Macht Frei" gate, the railway lines in

Birkenau and the four candles placed at the top of the stairs to the gas chamber.

I didn't cry and I didn't expect to. While walking around Auschwitz I didn't feel anything. The figures and facts were too much for me to comprehend. In contrast while walking in Birkenau I felt more emotional because it was much bigger and had not been turned into a museum (as such). It was natural, the way the victims had left it, here we get the real experience.

I don't think I have been able to process the events today, but after reflection and contemplation, it will become clear.

### **Camilla Reilly, Pupil**

How can I possibly put into words, an experience that has undoubtedly changed my life. As I sit here and write this I am in tears as I was at Birkenau, and will be many years to come when I think of this life changing and earth shattering experience. Not being an emotional person and the fact that I am crying shows to you the affect it has had on me. In this evaluation you have asked me to describe how I felt, what I anticipated, but I can't and I won't. Words will never be enough to explain what was going through my head, I was emotionless, until we got to Birkenau and saw the pictures of the Jews on the walls, before the war. The image that will always stay with me, one a little boy, the other a little girl. Both smiling, happy their whole lives ahead of them but their lives were taken away from them. The anger filled me, emotion overcame me. What had they done?

Today's trip opened my eyes, opened my heart and opened my mind. I have never, and doubt I ever will experience anything quite like it again. I thank everyone who went to the trouble of organising such an insightful day for me, and in a strange sort of way I thank the Jews, the hundreds upon thousands of innocent people who went through and endured such hardship before their death. As if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have been able to discover the deeper and better person inside me. Thank you for giving me that chance.

### **Emma Guthrie, Pupil**

I am extremely thankful to the fact that I was given the opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau. The experience was unforgettable; it allowed my understanding of the Holocaust to develop greatly while deepening my feelings and emotions towards this tragedy.

I am least unable to describe my feelings after spending the day at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I don't think the true experiences and emotions felt are able to be portrayed through words.

In order to truly feel the atmosphere of these places and understand the sheer horror of the events which occurred there, you must see Auschwitz-Birkenau, then you will understand.

## **Highland Council**

### ***Dornoch Academy***

#### **Michael Hook, Teacher**

Undoubtedly the most vivid and traumatic experience of my life. In many ways I felt I knew what to expect – I could not have been more wrong.

The size and scale of the death factory that was Birkenau overwhelmed me, as did the 'living' conditions experienced by the victims. Never have I been so horrified by man's inhumanity to man.

The visit has confirmed my belief that evil does exist in this world – the problem remains the same, how to confront and prevent this scale of atrocity from ever happening again. Perhaps I will not fully appreciate the impact the visit has had on me until I return home. It is, however, my intention to inform as many of my students as I can of this horror, and I plan to run future trips to Auschwitz for senior pupils – only by personally experiencing the camps can people really understand what happened. Many thanks to all who organised this trip.

#### **Jennifer Laurie, Pupil**

Not knowing what to expect I did not set out with any ideas or fixed views however I definitely was not prepared for what I found at Auschwitz. In particular I found the personal belongings of the prisoners brought into realisation for me the true scale and horror of what happened. This is especially true of the number of suitcases with the names of the prisoners written on them. It is these things that made me think more about what happened, it helped me see beyond the unimaginable figures of death and think more about individuals. At Birkenau the exhibition of the photographs retrieved from the prisoners belongings was very striking and surprisingly moving. The first thing to strike you about Birkenau is the sheer scale of it and despite only a limited number of buildings surviving it was extremely intimidating, and when you truly begin to think of its purpose it becomes nothing short of horrific.

At Auschwitz, I found the basement at block 11 to be extremely tragic and very difficult to fully comprehend.

However what made a lasting impression on me was not the buildings or displays however upsetting and tragic rather it was the feeling of the two camps. The silence is the first thing to hit you while a feeling of

loneliness surrounds the buildings. When you think of the “principles” upon which these camps were built the feeling of unease you experience is not one you can easily shake.

### **Roxanne Ridler, Pupil**

I found the whole experience extremely emotive and moving. Auschwitz struck me mostly probably because of the talk by a survivor heard beforehand. Rev. Levy’s words moved me, his thoughts and feelings were very clear, however they really never hit me until I saw the visual. I felt that the experience was far too short, I wanted to take my time on these. I felt my time for reflection was limited.

Before the trip, I was very nervous. At one point, I even considered not going, there was a tremendous fear inside me that I did not want to face. I wondered how I would feel when I arrived, I imagined that if I was worried days before the trip I would break down completely, I must say I was close.

The first impact that struck me was the human hair, my eyes were filled immediately with tears, from then on they were uncontrollable. However, I was determined to face the fear and walk away equipped with a truth that would never leave me. I stood, I observed and I held that thought. The suitcases piled high amongst each other struck me more so than the hair in many ways, the names of those that had perished were in front me, written by their very own hands with a thought of freedom from oppression, which later turned out to be false, a trick and a lie. How could people be so cruel?

Although Auschwitz was so much smaller than Birkenau, I still found myself in tears more so in Auschwitz. In Birkenau, I felt the loneliness and everywhere I walked all I could think of was how impossible it would be to survive the extremes of winter there. I was cold, and all I could think of was the fact that the prisoners had no shoes or warm clothes and yet how they still found the strength and the drive to carry on day after day. The strength of these people truly amazes me and I will never forget the experience.

### **Robyn Munro, Pupil**

The most affecting part of this trip for me was the photo gallery at Birkenau. No Hebrew, no prayers – just photos of families and loved ones. Yes, Jews died at Auschwitz. But they were, first and foremost people too, people no different to Gypsies. No different to the perpetrators themselves, a realisation at the very least of the horror of the Holocaust – not German killing Jew, but person killing person.

In terms of the technicalities of the trip, clearly a day is far from sufficient. Auschwitz would doubtless have

left a more lasting impression, had I taken more of it in. That said, my lasting impressions of the camps came just looking at everyday photos of the people that died.

An ‘enjoyable’ – worthwhile – experience. What struck me was how similar Auschwitz and Birkenau were to Russian Gulags, with KAPOS etc. Auschwitz itself felt a little unreal – I still can’t comprehend that the red brick buildings and tree lined streets oversaw so much carnage. It was like a reproduction.

## **Inverclyde Council**

### *Greenock High School*

#### **Jaelyn Molloy, Pupil**

The whole experience was much more disturbing seeing it visually. Before I came, I knew of the atrocities that happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau but I was not as prepared as I thought for what I saw.

Just being in the camp made it seem all the more realistic; this was real people this happened to, in a real place.

One thing that touched me greatly before we entered Poland was when Ernest Levy told us that “our mission was to never forget Auschwitz”. It was extremely hard for Ernest and this was evident in his words.

When we entered the blocks of Auschwitz, the one place that really brought it home to me was the room with the real belongings from the prisoners at Auschwitz, the hair, the glasses and lastly, the most harrowing sight was of children’s clothes – tiny jackets belonging to tiny children.

The real impact hit me though when we entered Block 27 and listened to a man singing a prayer. As he sang, I pictured the poor, innocent men, women and children being beaten and wondered how could anyone possibly justify what happened there.

Furthermore, when we entered Birkenau – the place where millions of Jews were “exterminated” – I wondered how they coped. Me, with my 3 pairs of socks, gloves, hat, 2 jumpers, 2 jackets and walking boots – and I was freezing. I imagined them, shoeless, clad in pyjamas and it really made me see how lucky society is today and how we must never forget what happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

### *Notre Dame High School*

#### **Jan Reagen, Pupil**

Today’s visit proved to me how real the Holocaust was. I had always known facts and stories about Auschwitz but my experiences of today have proved the true pain

and suffering of the Auschwitz victims and also the survivors.

Whilst in the camp, I was overcome with a feeling of isolation and loneliness, I suppose as all the people living in Auschwitz had felt. It was difficult to make conversation with those in the group. It was the opposite of what I had expected.

This experience has made me more aware of the Holocaust and as I have already said has hit home the reality of the things that happened there.

Certain aspects which stick in my mind was seeing the barracks where so many prisoners had stayed in desperate conditions and also seeing prisoners belongings like shoes, luggage, photographs, children's clothes and human hair.

I found the most hard-hitting part of today was standing in the gas chamber in Auschwitz with the knowledge of the mass murders and suffering that went on there.

More positively I am glad to say I can understand more and am more aware of the Holocaust and the toll it took on Jews, Germans, Polish and all the other prisoners in Auschwitz.

## ***Port Glasgow High School***

### **Melissa June Wilson, Pupil**

When I found out I had been picked to go on this trip I was extremely excited but I didn't really know much about Auschwitz-Birkenau and the horrible events that happened. Friends, family and teachers advised me to be ready for a very moving trip but this trip has been much more than that. It has been a very shocking yet informative experience and has helped me realise that although we sometimes think life is tough, our problems could never be compared to the many people who died in Auschwitz and Birkenau. As the woman from Real Radio put it, "we freak over the battery in our Ipad going dead, but would we rather have a standing prison cell". Even as we walked around Birkenau and were feeling extremely cold, I could not help but think that I was being selfish. I was complaining about the cold while standing in thick layers of clothing whereas the prisoners would have had to endure colder temperatures in only their light pyjamas. One of the many shocking facts I found out was that it would have had to be as cold as -15 degrees before the guards would have given the prisoners fuel for their bedrooms. One specific event that will stay in my memory is the children's clothes and suitcases we were shown, one of which belonged to a young girl called Hannah who was only 1 or 2 years old when taken to Auschwitz and was almost certainly taken straight to the gas chambers. When leaving the camp I felt sadness towards the

prisoners who died and the others who didn't and had to live with the horrible memories. I also felt relief at the fact that Jews in Poland no longer have to live in those horrible conditions. Although I felt anger towards the Germans, especially when seeing the belongings of the young children, I tried not to, as like Ernest Levy said, we cannot keep the hatred and anger going on.

Overall, this experience has shocked me into the realisation of how the Holocaust was a dreadful thing and I will certainly be sharing my experience with my friends, family and teachers so they know it's much more than just a moving trip.

## ***St. Columba's High***

### **Kathleen Lyons, Teacher**

I had read at length about the Holocaust but the "statistics" do not in any way have the same effect on you as items like the children's shoes or the hair.

The greyness and barrenness of Birkenau brought home the desolation and isolation that must have been felt by the prisoners.

As I left I feel even more the desire as a teacher to promote tolerance, to celebrate diversity and to warn children of the dangers when this does not happen.

### **Christopher Shearer, Pupil**

At first I was extremely frightened as I did not know what was lurking around every dark corner of Auschwitz I. When I walked in the gas chamber a feeling of hatred and great sympathy came over me. Although I was so angry that this had happened, at the same time it didn't really click (and still remains to click) that these horrific things actually went on, I felt as if I was on the set of a movie but there were no actors on set.

As our time in at Auschwitz I ended, Birkenau (or Auschwitz II) beckoned. We were taken into places of deplorable conditions that not even animals deserve to be subjected to. The rows of "toilets" (I use the term loosely) were horrible, their cramped sleeping conditions looked uncomfortable and unsafe and the description of their "meals" was simply horrible.

These people were humiliated for doing absolutely nothing but being themselves, being individuals and wanting to better their lives. People need to know about this so it never happens again.

## ***St. Stephens High School***

### **Andrew McCullagh, Pupil**

I would just like to say how much I enjoyed this chance to see something that I wish/hope never happens to

anyone. One moment that captured my thoughts was seeing the baby clothes, I could not imagine someone killing something so innocent and pure. It's hideous!

It makes you think what you have.

## **North Lanarkshire Council**

### ***Abronhill High School***

#### **Isaac McCleary, Teacher**

Statistics can relay a degree of the horror and the atrocity. Seeing first hand the personal belongings, knowing that – for some – the items of clothing worn to their murder was their best, reading the names of individuals on their luggage simply cannot be described. I became aware as never before that we are mourning individuals not statistics.

### ***Columba High School***

#### **Mrs Ellen Walker, Teacher**

I don't know how to express my feelings, I need time! I do, of course know a great deal about the Holocaust, from personal reading, watching TV documentaries and preparing materials for use in class. Today, I never really learned anything new, in terms of facts and information.

My lasting impression will be of the vast, emptiness of Auschwitz-Birkenau. You cannot make sense of this terrible event, there is no sense, no reason, no excuse nothing.

#### **Lorraine McDonagh, Pupil**

I never really understood or had a lot of knowledge of what had actually happened in the concentration camps. My visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau helped broaden and expand my ideas and views on the horrendous torture these innocent people went through. Seeing where they slept and also the cells the victims were kept in, hundreds at a time, made me realise how lucky I am, but also scared that our own humanity can cause such torment and suffering. When I saw all of the belongings of these people my heart sank into my stomach, thinking to myself that these were ordinary people just like you and me.

The eerie silence of both Auschwitz and Birkenau helps you think clearly about the sadness of the losses of the millions and millions of people who were unaware they were being walked to their own deaths. Walking through both camps I kept thinking to myself "these innocent men, women and children didn't know they were going to die whether it was through the gas chambers, hard labour, poor diets or disease. As soon as they passed through these gates of death that was it! Although I am

aware of the goings on; the cruelty, the torment and most sickening of all the experiments which they carried out on them (mainly the gypsy children) I am unaware as to how people could do this to others. It sickens me to think how bitter and twisted they must have been.

Children's shoes, millions of pairs of them, some barely even the size of the palm of my hand were found along with remains of their old torn clothes.

All in all I had a very emotional yet extremely informative and interesting day and I hope to revisit the camps in the future and take some time to reflect on the tragic massacre that happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

#### **Katherine Nolan, Pupil**

This experience of Auschwitz has given me a great insight of what it was like for those victims. I can take my experience home with me and share it with others and try to stop anything like this happening again. At Birkenau it left me with a sense of sadness and anger of how cruel people can be. The silence especially could make you think back at what it would have been like. We were all really cold with our heavy jackets, hats, scarves and gloves on, and millions of people 60 years ago maybe didn't even have shoes on. Then you think would they have complained about the cold when they suffered more than we did – no.

When we arrived at Auschwitz I didn't really see the main reason of why we were there. However as we started to walk around the different parts and see what really happened, it made me feel like I wanted to cry. The places where millions of people were murdered and the shrines to these people, the victims' hair (you just can't help but think that could be our hair or that of one of your family). There was a pair of red shoes which stuck out in the children's shoes. It is something I would have worn, or one of my friends when we were younger. However, this little girl isn't here now to say the same things. Seeing these things will haunt me for the rest of my life, until we can do something that can stop this from happening ever again. Also, if we show more and more people what it was like; hard labour, poor living conditions, poor diet, only being allowed to go to the toilet twice a day, then I believe we can make a difference in and change people's lives and views, like ours was today.

## ***Lanarkshire Global Education Centre***

#### **John Dornan**

The concern I had before I came was whether what I thought I knew already would leave me unmoved. But books and documentaries even dramatisations like 'Schindler's List' cannot prepare you for the ruthless, dehumanising impact of this death factory. The systematic way in which the whole process was planned

causes you to question whether this could be done by human beings. But I cannot deny that this was done to human beings by other human beings and I am appalled that we are capable of this.

The lasting impact for me will not be this sense of industrialised execution but a sense of images:

- The sign above the main gate at Auschwitz 1. Arbeit Macht Frei – may we work to ensure that no group of humans ever suffer in this way again and so free us from our debt to all victims of the Holocaust.
- The execution wall at block 11
- The Jewish Martyr's memorial and God's admonition to Cain 'the blood of your brother cries out to me from the earth'.
- The rail lines coming through the gate at Birkenau
- The demolished ruins of the crematoria – the first step in the process of denial
- Lighting a candle to destroy the darkness
- Walking along the tracks away from the memorial and wondering how I can take this experience home to my family and friends and the many young people I work with.

Maybe the whole of humanity died a little in the concentration camps.

What can we do now and for the future – remember and ask forgiveness from all who died needlessly as a result of our own indifference – and educate every generation into peace, tolerance and respect for diversity.

## ***Rosehall High School***

### **Charles Fawcett, Teacher**

Superb visit, the tour operator was excellent, the detail and descriptions were informative, accurate but also gave a lot of the intensity and emotion behind what it may have been like during that time. The impact for me was like a series of 'thumps' each time a new revelation or insight was revealed. Listening to the comments of pupils it also had a very profound and revealing attitude towards them, in particular our two children, who are followers of Islam, I think for that factor alone it was very worthwhile.

The sheer scale and size of the operation takes your breath away irrespective of what you have read or seen on the TV. The fact of being there places you in a unique position, where you try to imagine what it was like. As a parent, as a child as a Nazi (it is difficult to come to terms with those soldiers acting in the way they did and their mindset). It reminds me of the traumatic consequences of religious intolerance in the extreme. It

will re-energize me in my personal quest to speak out whenever I see injustice, in particular, relating to religious intolerance, sectarianism etc.

The informal ceremony was very moving, however I felt that a comment about the injustice of topics currently active e.g Iraq, could have given a balance to the homily without losing the impact of what has happened historically.

I cannot fault and would congratulate everyone involved in the concept. Much more must be done!! This type of visit has to be repeated and developed for children and teachers – please. Could I also suggest that instead of a visit to the Synagogue or the Photo Museum, that the pupil and teachers go to the Jewish Quarter in Krakow and have a meal. This would allow them to discuss and comment with other pupils and teachers from different schools, faiths and background. This I feel is a crucial element of what we are trying to do, to educate, to prevent any further genocide. This would, I feel, maximise the impact and would help the youngsters express their observations, feelings and thoughts and to spread the message of this unimaginable tragedy.

### **Jennifer Spiers, Pupil**

The point at the very end when we were taken to the last building and when I saw the pictures of the people I was really moved and it made the experience more real because the pictures of those happy people were the people that were badly treated and those who did not deserve it.

### **Azim Ahmed, Pupil**

Before I came, I was told what happened and I was not convinced. When I came to Poland it has made me emotional seeing what kind of circumstances they lived in. I was pleased we were toured around by a guide in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The specific moment that captured my experience in Auschwitz-Birkenau was when we went to the gas chamber (Auschwitz 1) knowing there were 700 people in a small room, nearly double the number of people who go to my school.

### **Omar Naseem, Pupil**

Before arriving in Poland, I was told what had happened in Auschwitz. I was not convinced of what people were saying. Arriving in Poland was a great experience. By being toured around by a guide around Auschwitz-Birkenau, I really realised the circumstances of millions of prisoners. The specific moment that captured my feelings was the chamber that contained hair and shoes of prisoners. Having walked around the chambers in warm clothes and heavy outdoor wear, I was still really cold. Back in 1942, from what I saw

today, the remains of prisoners clothes looked very thin. Small children and women walking in the snow with thin clothes. I just couldn't imagine it! Such an experience for children and pregnant women shouldn't have existed.

## ***St. Ambrose High School***

### **Martin Mann, Pupil**

I expected to be told the details of how the Nazis murdered Jews, Gypsies, Poles and Russians in the death camp but I was unprepared for what I was told. The fact that gold teeth were stolen from the dead, possessions taken and all body hair shaved from each victim was very distressing. However the most disturbing information was how the trains ran straight to the crematorium with passengers who had not seemed in good enough health to be used as slave labourers. I am unable to understand why men more intelligent than myself, after all there were doctors and physicians participating in the Holocaust, could not understand that what they were doing was evil, unforgivable. This hatred for a particular religion and the extreme measures used in the attempt to exterminate this religion was unimaginable, yet it happened and we must never forget it. I think that further visits should be scheduled during winter as it drives home the message of how terrible this camp was and how both mentally and physically strong you had to be in order to survive. I think we should be made more aware of political parties that exist which are just as dangerous as the Nazis were and proved to be. There is still a Nazi party in Germany, political extremists in the USA (although they are a minority). But most importantly parties such as the BNP in the UK.

### **Christopher Jones, Pupil,**

The Auschwitz-Birkenau experience served as graphic confirmation of facts I have long known about the Holocaust. After seeing the Nazi camps it seems impossible to comprehend the scale of the events which took place but in my opinion the trip served as a valuable reminder of why the events of 1939–45 should never be forgotten. I also found Rabbi Marcus' closing speech at Birkenau to be particularly moving. I would suggest carrying out any future visits in the winter months as this added somewhat to my understanding of the hardship faced by the prisoners in freezing conditions.

## ***St. Patrick's High School***

### **Denise E Bruce, Teacher**

An excellent day:

- Memorable

- Moving
- Inspiring – the courage of so many in such awful conditions.

### *Auschwitz 2 (Birkenau)*

A place of horror, yet a place of inspiration. That so many lost their lives, that so many endured so much is beyond comprehension. To visit this place is to relive history and to ensure that history should not be repeated.

### **Emma McFarlane and Alyson McKinney, Pupils**

We have been very very moved by this experience.

Before the visit we thought we knew what had happened at Auschwitz, now we know but simply do not understand how it could have happened.

Auschwitz 1 was very 'informative', particularly the visit to the pavilions. No one really can understand the horror without seeing it.

Auschwitz 2 (Birkenau) was extremely moving. Standing in the freezing cold, in the silence of winter gave some, albeit limited, insight into the atrocities of that terrible place. Seeing the items and photographs brought home the horror – so many poor souls lost to evil.

Rabbi Marcus deserves to be thanked for his moving and inspirational talks/reflections. We would also like to thank the organisers for 'making' this experience 'happen'. We promise that on returning to school we will reflect upon our experiences and talk to our friends about we have witnessed at Auschwitz.

## ***Council Education Services***

### **Brian Kelly, Quality Improvement Officer**

Being a history teacher from the past who taught 'the Holocaust' as a course, this trip has reinforced the importance that pupils should be exposed to this part of history. The importance of remembering these terrible events as a way of hopefully preventing similar events again 'remains' and should always remain a priority.

The trip for me really struck home with the visit to Birkenau, especially at this time of year. The bleak cold seems to really hit you and is something which I will never be able to forget. The walk round Birkenau enabled me to visualise in some small way what it must have been like for these miserable souls who must have quickly lost the will to live. The descriptions given by the guide added to this significantly. All in all a very worthwhile visit which I would and will recommend to others. Thank you.

# Perth & Kinross Council

## *Breadalbane Academy*

### **Yvonne M Benning, Teacher**

Birkenau – to complain of the cold felt trivial when you considered what these poor souls handled with dignity.

Listening to our guide talk of how important the Holocaust is, as part of Polish history was humbling.

Although day was rushed – being parachuted in from our comfortable, complacent lives gives one food for thought.

Retracing our steps back along railway line towards entrance to Birkenau will remain with me for life.

At Auschwitz seeing the personal effects but especially the suitcases – help us remember statistics are/were real people – the photographs in Birkenau reinforced this.

With grateful thanks to the organisers – a lot of work but people's reactions make it worthwhile

### **Sara Brown, Pupil**

My experience of Auschwitz 1 was a great deal different to what I expected. My expectations were to see run down buildings and think of nothing but the Jews who were tortured and killed. To begin with, this was the case. However, standing between blocks 10 and 11 my feelings turned towards the Nazis. I stood facing the wall where the innocent stood, humiliated and waiting. I stood staring at the wall where people – nothing more, nothing less but people – were brutally killed. But I was expecting these feelings, maybe not as strongly as I did however. The emotion I was not expecting was a sickened rage. I stood where other people raised an arm with a loaded gun and voluntarily shot their own kind.

The rooms full of Jewish property affected me in a similar way. The property was kept and re-used. The luggage was personalised with names and dates of birth. Yet this meant nothing to the Nazis, it was merely more items for their collection.

Finally at Auschwitz 1, the wooden structure that hung Rudolf Hoess. The man who was the commander of a murder camp, who happily lived with his family overlooking such monstrosities. He was killed in his own concentration camp. Ironic? Yes. Justice? Hardly. He was willing to wipe out the Jewish population, to put an end to generations, and cause so much suffering because he thought it was right.

My experience at Birkenau was quite different. Unlike Auschwitz 1, this wasn't a collection of stone buildings built close together. Birkenau was a wide open space

with small wooden or stone barracks. The size was unbelievable and was unsettling. This large space, with regularly spaced barracks was built to kill. And kill in mass numbers. My emotions were only for the Jews. They were forced to go through humiliation and horrific conditions or die. What would they have done had they been given the choice?

It was almost impossible to escape the complaints of "It's so cold" or "I'm freezing" while wrapped up in numerous layers, with extra warmth, not even the height of winter. These complaints were heard while standing within a barrack – the home of the Jews while at Birkenau. Would it be possible to even begin to understand how they survived? Or even why they fought on?

The element of the camp that left me unsettled was the deafening silence. No matter how hard you listened, there was no sound of a bird or the distant rumble of cars, not even the wind. It was almost like the silence was screaming the idea that those who were murdered here no longer have a voice.

Lighting my candle at the end may seem like an insignificant gesture considering, yet it eased something inside of me. What, I don't know, but it meant a lot. After placing my candle down and stepping back, it was now lost amongst the rest of the glowing candles and it showed that the gesture was made by so many people, because it had affected so many there.

My visit to Auschwitz increased my understanding of the effect on the population of Jews in Poland. The thousands that died obviously ending generations, and the few survivors were now such a minority.

Events during the day that stand out for me are many. However, standing on the railway line looking back towards the main gate at Birkenau really stood out for me. I walked down that railway line on my own thinking about everything that happened on either side of me and my own life and what the Rabbi had said. One final event was Rabbi Marcus' speech. His voice echoed around the empty camp, a voice explaining the trauma of Birkenau, a voice for the Jews.

### **Fiona Duncan, Pupil**

I have thoroughly enjoyed my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Although Auschwitz deepened my knowledge of the Holocaust it was the group's visit to Birkenau that I found most moving. In particular I thought that the long walk from the entrance to the crematorium and then back again was eye-opening, it allowed the group and myself to view the camp in full, feel the cold and the presence of the watch towers which maximised the impact of the experience. In addition I found the two thousand photographs very

moving as they introduced personality and lives to the victims who are easily generalised.

As I entered Birkenau I was overwhelmed by the sheer size of the camp. I was overcome by a feeling of insignificance and of shame for acts of atrocity I can never understand.

Finally I feel anxious as the full impact of today's experience has not yet occurred this is because I have not had a long period for personal reflection. I have not yet attempted to imagine the horror faced by those imprisoned. I will forever remember the personal experience brought on by today's visit. Beforehand the Holocaust remained an event that was not truly real to me. Although aware of what happened to a certain degree I did not see it as something that existed in my own reality but more as something that existed in history like the 'Red Terror'. This visit has changed that entirely.

A truly eye-opening experience that is deeply disturbing. The atrocity that humans can commit are revealed in all their evil. Thank you for the opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau, understanding the Holocaust on an emotional level is truly a life changing experience.

### **Eilidh Ferguson, Pupil,**

I don't think the enormity of what we have seen today has sunk in yet. The number of people murdered in the concentration camps and the full extent of their suffering is, for me at the moment, still unimaginable. Walking along the path that so many innocent people unknowingly walked to their death, was unnerving. It was freezing cold, despite being wrapped up in numerous layers of clothing. To think of the poor victims, being made to live in wooden brick 'huts' wearing thin 'pyjamas' is saddening. The atmosphere in Birkenau was eerie, it was very quiet and vast. I was shocked at how big it actually was. It carried a feeling of loneliness, which was strange with 150+ people walking about. It is a desolate place.

### **Iain Kennedy, Pupil**

The sheer scale of Birkenau was what made the biggest impact on me.

Although I have read much on the Holocaust and had thought myself reasonably capable of thinking of and perhaps even sympathising with the people who had this situation forced upon them under Nazi rule, but I now feel differently. I now feel that we are very fortunate in that we cannot even begin to accurately imagine just what it felt like, but yet I feel that I can do so now much better than I ever could have before.

Some feelings that will stay with me is having to listen to numerous people moaning about the cold whilst

standing at the crematoria, despite the fact that we were wearing numerous layers and were soon to return to a bus. To then think of starved exhausted people having to live in such conditions in only thin pyjamas.

## ***St. Columba's High School.***

### **Allan Cameron, Pupil**

Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau was a unique and memorable experience which I would recommend to anyone studying or just interested in history. Seeing the conditions in which the Jews and other prisoners lived and worked and experiencing the harsh weather (although not as harsh as the prisoners experienced) made me wonder how anyone survived at all. The rooms full of personal items taken from the prisoners helped me to appreciate the huge scale on which this atrocity occurred. The exhibit featuring photographs of victims put human faces to the figures. Seeing photographs of men, women and children who would sooner or later meet their end in Auschwitz was an emotional experience as the people were not altogether different from my own family, just normal people going about their lives unaware of the horrors that awaited them. The millions that died should not be forgotten so that the atrocity that was the Holocaust is never repeated.

## **Renfrewshire Council**

### ***Castlehead High School***

#### **Nadia Cowan, Teacher**

Two things stand out for me from Auschwitz-Birkenau:

- The pile of children's shoes. Pretty little red sandals amongst them. Carefree children facing the most horrific death. A mother's worst nightmare.
- The family photos exhibited (in the hall where newcomers were 'processed'). So many of those photos looked like my grandparents' photos. There was even one which was so like my gran with my father as a child. It made it so real – my grandparents and my father (a baby at the time) were in Italy when war was declared. My grandfather (an Italian) bribed his way back to Britain where they had been living for two years. The photo could have been them in other circumstances.

It was a very moving day, and will take a long time to "impact" mentally and emotionally.

Thank you so much for organising this trip. The memories of it will "haunt" me forever I think.

Rev Barry Marcus' plea to stand up and speak out when injustices are being carried out was inspiring. Let's hope

those of us who went through today together have the courage and strength to do so.

Thank you.

### **Stephen Paton, Pupil**

To begin with, I had no idea what to expect. I had only heard that it would be disturbing, but other than that, I had no idea how I would feel. There were a few moments that really captured my experience. Seeing all the shaved hair was one of these. The other was the bags all clearly labelled by Jews thinking their luggage would follow. The moment that summed it all up though was in Block 27 when the Rabbi played us a piece of Jewish music which brought everything back at once. My understanding of the Holocaust has changed, as have my feelings towards the subject. On leaving the camp I felt so drained, physically and mentally, but I know that the full extent of what happened today will not come crashing home for another little while. One thing I felt while I was there was that what I was seeing could not possibly be real. The fact that I know it was real is what makes it so difficult to understand. Overall, it was a trip I would not want to have missed, and believe it has done me more good than bad. Thank you.

### **Stacey McLeod, Pupil**

Seeing Auschwitz has been a tremendous, yet emotional experience for me. As many people know the Holocaust was a horrendous and barbaric event, but before I had experienced being there for myself, it was just that: an event. I had no personal connection with it.

However, today brought those facts and figures alive. Before they were just statistics but today made me realise that each “statistic” was a unique individual; just like me, with hopes and ambitions.

This trip has been extremely thought provocative. Throughout the day many questions I’ve pondered, mostly “Why?” Some aspects of this question have been answered but it is beyond my own comprehension why so many people were slaughtered at the hands of vicious men, with no consideration for age or sex.

Today has allowed me to almost relive what these innocent people had to endure. It deeply saddens me to think that humans can be so cruel to one another. I now feel extremely privileged to be free to believe what I want to without being faced with persecution and death.

As I leave now I know these people suffered needlessly and because of bystanders, people who said nothing, millions perished. I know now, that having seen this “hell-hole” for myself that this can never happen again, so when I go back to my school I will share this experience with my peers and do my part to stop it re-occurring.

This trip has changed the way I think and the way I take things for granted i.e. my freedom. Thank you, this trip has been very worthwhile.

## **Scottish Borders Council**

### *Earlston High School*

#### **Sarah Christie, Pupil,**

To hear Ernest Levy’s account of his experiences during his time in Auschwitz was a very moving and fascinating moment. As someone who knows very few survivors from the Second World War, to hear his troubling and honest account was a rare and memorable experience.

My first impression of Auschwitz was one of surprise as the brick buildings were not at all what I had imagined. The buildings certainly weren’t attractive, but they were not as horrific as I had envisaged. However, seeing the piles of shorn women’s hair and discovering that it had been sold to the German textile industry for clothing was unsettling and shocking. These feelings were highlighted when we viewed hundreds of the victims’ shoes and it was revealed to us that the ashes from the burned bodies were used as fertiliser. Such disregard or lack of respect for the men, women and children was disgusting. The camp’s crematorium was an eerie experience; seeing the lines of ovens made the entire process appear calculated and mechanical, the bodies of the dead were treated with no dignity or sympathy.

Birkenau looked more similar to the image of the concentration camp that I had expected; lines and lines of barracks, watchtowers and barbed wire contributed to the cruel, menacing appearance that I had created in my mind. The conditions that the prisoners were subjected to appalled me as the barracks had been intended for horses’ stables. Their treatment was disgusting; the stories that were recounted to us were almost unbelievable.

It is difficult to comprehend the human suffering undergone throughout the Holocaust; however it is perhaps far more difficult to understand the human race’s potential to inflict such pain and horror. By seeing Auschwitz for myself, the statistics and survivors’ accounts became a grim reality. The importance of understanding and respecting our past cannot be underestimated as our future actions may be influenced and determined by the lessons learned. I will never forget this experience and hopefully by reflecting to others my memories won’t be forgotten.

## *Galashiels Academy*

### **Katy Jenkins, Pupil**

My experience of the one day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau was incongruent to my expectations, particularly Auschwitz II. From the Watch tower I was overwhelmed by the land below of repeating barracks and disturbing high fences strung together with barbed wire. As we walked to various sections of the camp I felt increasingly colder and colder, my feet were freezing! But then I thought to myself – how could I possibly complain? Thousands of poor camp inhabitants did the exact same without the warmth of the clothes I wore. The bravery they had was staggering. I now have a more comprehensible view of the Holocaust, the factual information I learned contributing to this.

As disturbing and life-changing as some of the experiences I had today, I consider myself one of the few, lucky people to witness them. The haunting visit to the gas chamber in Auschwitz particularly stands out as I travel home. The thought of being in a place where only 60 years ago there was terror, prisoners frantically wondering what was to happen to them. Little did they know that they would never see daylight again.

Although some of the statistics were incredibly difficult to understand, I can live the rest of my life remembering them, and even if I still fail to realise the enormity of the Holocaust, I can tell others and spread the word, as it would be a great shame if memories from an event like the Holocaust were lost from our lives, so I will do my very best to try and convey to others what I experienced, and hopefully one day they can have the unique memories that I have.

An excellent, life-changing experience. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.

## **South Ayrshire Council**

### *Belmont Academy*

#### **Tom Green, Principal Teacher of History**

In his moving address to the group at the end of the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau Rabbi Barry Marcus reminded everyone that we would be leaving the camp – the victims of the Holocaust did not. Instead they endured a hell on earth beyond normal human experience and comprehension.

I have not taught the Holocaust to my S2 (second year) secondary pupils for many years but had never experienced what a concentration / death camp felt like. This trip gave me that experience. It broadened my knowledge and will inform my future work with pupils. It is important for me as a practicing history teacher to

see, experience and understand what I teach. I visit places of historical interest relevant to my curriculum as often as I can and this trip has let me feel – as best I can – what it was like for Holocaust victims.

I have seen photographs and read accounts of the Holocaust but, as Ernest Levy told us, places are not important but people are. This was in response to his move to Glasgow. In a different context, Auschwitz is clearly very important and it is correct to preserve it but my most vivid memories will be of the people and their possessions. The photographs showed us who they were and their plundered belongings drove home the tragedy of their fate.

It is impossible not to be angry.”

### **Claire Philpott, Pupil**

Before the visit I had no idea really of the hardship faced by the Jews during their imprisonment, I had read statistics in books but it was only when I saw the huge amounts of women’s hair, shoes, hair brushes etc that I truly understood the horrors they faced. As soon as I arrived the temperature was below freezing but I had a number of warm layers, that was not the case for the Jews. They were cold, starving, worked too hard but the worst of it was they were killed just because of their religion. How could one man even contemplate doing this to so many people? As I saw the gate of the camp I began to picture the millions of Jews that came in but unfortunately never came out.

At least I was able to experience the horrors faced by the Jews but still manage to leave at the end of it.

I would like to thank you for organising this amazing trip which didn’t just teach me so much, it made me appreciate the horrors faced by the Jews and hopefully the more people who are taught about the traumatic experience the less likely there will be a repeat of history. Hopefully it will stay in the past.

The photographs at Birkenau of real people, with their families, friends and enjoying themselves, like us, has made me appreciate what I have. Made me actually realise how I take things for granted.

The trip overall was really fulfilling and I am honoured to have been able to participate. It has certainly left me with images I will never forget.

### **Kirsten Hainey, Pupil**

I found the day to be very informative, as well as incredibly moving. In particular I thought the belongings of the people gassed on arrival was very upsetting. Seeing a huge mound of women’s hair shaved off after they had been gassed has a greater effect than reading statistics in a book. The sheer volume of hair was shocking, but it was even more

# South Lanarkshire Council

## *Stonelaw High School*

### **Corrina Elder, Teacher**

Throughout today I was overwhelmed by the sheer size of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The extreme conditions people had to live in and the cruel and calculated methods of death and torture. Looking at family photographs in Birkenau of Jewish people living a 'normal' happy life and photographs of starving and painfully thin women and men made me realize that these people were just like me. It was not like reading a book, I was seeing it with my own eyes. I will always carry the memory of the hair, the suitcases with peoples' names and age, block II and the children's boots. After today, I feel responsible and determined to share my experience in Auschwitz with others

### **Beth Keenan, Pupil**

The experience was very surreal. I spent a lot of my time trying to make myself believe that these atrocities had happened in the very place I was standing in. Auschwitz was very quick. I would have liked to spend more time taking it all in. However, I thought it was very well organised. The exhibits really got to me and helped me to understand the sheer volume of people going through the camp. The pictures up on the wall before we listened to the prayer really made me understand the pain people went through.

Birkenau was completely different but equally good, if not better. The size of it was unbelievable. Seeing the huts and finding out how many people were crammed into them helped me understand how badly these people were treated. Seeing the photographs of people's lives before Birkenau really upset me. I could imagine pictures of my own friends and family just like the ones I was seeing. It brought home that these people were just like me. I don't think my visit has had its full effect on me yet because I have been so busy and haven't had the time to reflect. I have learnt so much and I think it was totally worthwhile

### **Jason Hamilton, Pupil**

In my opinion, the day was very interesting. I feel that I will look at things in a different way. I just can't believe that one man can cause so much evil in the world and how he can let prisoners walk about in sub zero temperatures in very light clothing. I also thought the day was very emotional with seeing all the different things. I also feel as well that in Auschwitz there was a lot to see for example clothes and shoes. In Birkenau, it was a lot more imaginative in that you had to think what happened.

disturbing to know that the large amount of hair was that which was found in the camp on liberation the majority having been sent to Germany to make cloth. Similarly the room which contained the shoes illustrated the huge waste of human life that cannot be fully comprehended by reading a textbook.

When we went to Birkenau I felt that I could better understand what life was like for the prisoners that cannot be learnt from books. Seeing the barracks in which the prisoners lived brought the scene to life in a way that history books cannot. We were fully wrapped up in jackets, hats, scarves and gloves, and were still feeling the effect of the bitter cold, and so the suffering of the prisoners with only thin clothing must have been unbearable in the freezing Polish winter.

I think the whole experience has meant that for me, the Holocaust does not seem as distant and far off as it did before visiting the site and experiencing it first hand."

### **Andrew McGee, Pupil**

I felt that the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau was a deeply emotive and moving experience. I thought that the vast amounts of personal belongings recovered at the death camps was particularly harrowing because it demonstrated first of all the sheer number of people – mainly of the Jewish faith – who were massacred there and also served as physical evidence that these men and women really walked here before us.

### **James Wallace, Pupil**

There was one specific moment in the day which will probably stick with me forever. It was when we were standing in Birkenau listening to the Rabbi talk about the Holocaust and the final solution. This was the first time I had ever experienced an opinion on the Holocaust from a member of the Jewish community. I felt very moved by this as I stood there trying to imagine how I would feel if I was Jewish. This is probably when the significance and the sheer brutality of what the Nazis did and I felt hatred towards them and I became bewildered at how they could just kill their fellow human beings, people they didn't even know. The biggest question that today made me want to find an answer for was why kill innocent people you have never met and how could they live with themselves after killing one person let alone millions!

I expected to feel very down during my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau but I didn't. I believe that what I experienced today was so horrific that I haven't fully taken it in yet.

## ***Council Media Department***

### **Carolyn Smeaton**

I have researched the Holocaust in the past and until today thought I had a good understanding of it. I now realise I know nothing at all. Today's trip made the whole thing personal – I could put myself in their place and it brought many emotions – anger, sadness, disbelief that something like this can happen. I cried when I saw the mounds of hair and standing in the first gas chamber in Auschwitz. I couldn't believe the scale of the killing, as shown by the model of the gas chambers and the sheer scale of Birkenau was inconceivable.

I now firmly believe that everyone should make the trip once in their life because until you have seen it with your own eyes you will never comprehend the full horror. I thank you for allowing me the privilege.

I am going home to give my five year old daughter a huge hug as she sleeps because the most upsetting thing for me is that if it happened all over again there would be nothing I could do to protect or save her and as a mother that is all you want to do.

## **Stirling Council**

### ***Stirling High School***

#### **Claire Richardson, Teacher**

I have been fascinated by the Holocaust since I was a child as my primary teacher encouraged me to read the Diary of Anne Frank. Now as a teacher myself, I have the responsibility to ensure that my students are given the opportunity to study this important period of history. Despite reading widely and watching many documentaries, particularly in relation to Auschwitz-Birkenau, I could only imagine what it must have been like to stand on the railway platform at Birkenau or walk through the doors of Block 11 at Auschwitz 1.

Today has been an emotionally draining experience. As I arrived in Auschwitz 1 this morning, Ernest Levy was on my mind. He told us last night that the only way to escape was "through the chimney". His words came back to me as I walked through the infamous gate, past the watch towers and barbed wire. The enormity of the massacre was particularly driven home when I was exposed to the displays of human hair, glasses, shoes and false limbs. These images will stay with me forever. The reality of Block 11 was distressing. The starvation cells, the standing cells and the torture chambers sent a chill through me. The pain and the heartbreak of the prisoners was tangible.

The reality of Birkenau was also distressing. The dehumanisation of the prisoners – their hair cut by blunt razors, their daily fight for the toilet, their insect-

ridden clothing – demonstrates the evil that existed here. The scale of the camp is overwhelming. Walking along the railway track in freezing temperatures, past the crematoriums made me reflect on my experiences today. Perhaps the images contained within the "Before They Died" presentation, however, sum up my feelings best. These people had hopes and dreams that never came to fruition. This one day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau will help ensure that their memory is never forgotten. This is a visit that everyone should make to help them truly understand the horror of the Holocaust.

#### **Nicola Taylor, Pupil**

I couldn't help but feel a sense of relief as I walked through the gates of Birkenau back onto the bus. The very fact that after a long day of being absolutely freezing (despite my 10 layers), I was able to say I was going home. This was something that many Jewish people could not say! And I didn't really appreciate that until today. Despite having a great knowledge about the Holocaust, Auschwitz-Birkenau was nothing like I expected. Because to be honest, Nothing – No amount of books, documentaries or films could have prepared me for what I have witnessed today. The endless amount of hair, shoes, especially children's shoes and everyday appliances really put it into perspective how destructive and humiliating the Holocaust was.

#### **Fiona McFadzean, Pupil**

Nothing could have prepared me fully for this experience. Nothing. As a pupil studying German history at school I have explored the Nazis and their ideology and actions through countless textbooks and videos, but the ultimate impact of the atrocities that took place in Auschwitz-Birkenau only comes alive when you are there yourself. Seeing these places with my own eyes has let me witness the nightmare beyond the textbook photography I have seen so many times. I was there, in the freezing cold, wrapped up warmly in the gloves, scarf, hat and coat a prisoner would have been without. Knowing, and feeling safe in the knowledge that a bus would be waiting to carry us out at the end of it all.

As we were shown around the camps a number of things struck me suddenly, and they made me think of all those victims. Those who lost their own life, those who lost their family, those who lost all of their past treasures and memories. I felt that displays such as the human hair, artificial limbs minus the living people who would have relied on them and certainly the used Zyklon B canisters were particularly haunting. Although I don't believe that any individual could ever completely understand what, and in my opinion, why things constituting such devastating and unprecedented evil took place at these concentration camps at the hands of the Nazis, these images will doubtless linger in my mind forever. And then there were the shoes, absolute

mountains of shoes. The suitcases, poignant reminders of the ages of some of the victims; our guide pointed out specifically those that had belonged to young children aged only around one, three and eight.

There is undeniably a terrifying air in circulation around Auschwitz-Birkenau, and I felt quite sure that I am not the only person it touched. Something originating in the silence, and the isolation.

We were taken into a gas chamber in Auschwitz 1, and when the slits used to insert the lethal Zyklon B were shown I felt something I can hardly describe in words. The uneasiness. People died: they were taken in there and murdered. I walked back out into the piercing cold air and breathed once more, and they would not have. Our exit was so simple, whereas the prisoners who entered that building would have then been cremated until everything that they once were turned to ashes alone. We were addressed by a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ernest Levy, the evening prior to visiting Poland, and his words touched me greatly. Those who entered a crematorium took the only way out.

Perhaps the first thing that hit me concerning Birkenau was the sheer size of it all, and how organised it must have been. Standing in the wooden barracks, shivering despite extensive cosy clothing, I was forced to consider just how uncomfortable living conditions were. It was shocking to view one of the toilet areas and imagine there being only three of these buildings for sixteen lots of barracks. Devastating to even think about the way these prisoners were made to fight just to use toilet facilities, especially when ill, and that they were so packed into their barracks, barracks originally of wood designed for the stabling of animals.

The “Before They Died” exhibition was equally disturbing. These people had families and friends, a normal past; they were normal people. They had hopes and dreams, possessed the photos of those they cared about most when transported to the camp.

On our return to the buses we escaped when these innocent people perished. We exited through the way they only entered, never to emerge. Their voices lost? I may have left my family for just two days, but many of these families were destroyed forever.

## **Private Individuals/ Representatives from Organisations**

### **Rowena Arshad, Centre for Education in Racial Equality Scotland (CERES)**

I was worried on leaving Auschwitz I thought I was not as ‘affected’ as I thought I was going to be. It was

sanitised but Birkenau was quite the opposite. I am speaking at a Conference this Saturday in Perth on A Curriculum for Excellence – the latest initiative from the Scottish Executive. I deliberately did not prepare the talk because of today. I knew today would influence the tone of my talk titled ‘Responsible Citizens’. One thing I will say is that in ‘de-cluttering’ the curriculum, we must not sanitise it of issues like the Holocaust, to avoid discussion about racism, anti-Semitism and discrimination preferring instead to keep within comfort zones discussing ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’.

If we are to be the ambassadors of tomorrow on matters of humanity, we must not close our eyes or ears to the horrors of what has been ... “lest we forget and fail to learn”.

Jim – Thanks very much.

### **Edna Sommerville, CERES**

I was surprised at how organised Auschwitz was – not what I expected – although the mounds of belongings brought home to me that people had arrived with their hopes and dreams and most never had the chance to fulfil these. For young women to be treated so inhumanely was awful, terrible for all, but really bad for young sheltered women. What the fathers must have gone through when they were separated from their wives and family doesn’t bear thinking of and how could any human being be so cruel to babies and young children? When we arrived at Birkenau, it was what I expected, but much bigger. How anyone could survive in the camp, especially in winter, is unimaginable. Even though I was well wrapped up today I was still freezing and don’t think I would have been able to bear the cold. I hope that never again any human being or country treats another human being with such cruelty and lack of dignity

### **Frank Boyd, Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance**

I am very glad I came. I am 58 so I am very familiar with the place from photographs, film etc. It is as I had thought it would be, only much larger, especially Birkenau – that was a terrible surprise. The numbers 1½ million, 2½ million, 6 million are really incomprehensible. Trying to understand the scale of the atrocity is impossible from the numbers, however the simple things struck me and touched me most. Firstly, I must mention our two tour guides. They were just fantastic. The woman who took us through Auschwitz and Birkenau conveyed by her manner and demeanour the perfect gravity of the place. The next thing that made a profound impression was the exhibits of the suitcases with people’s names written on things and then the children’s clothes. It is always the simplest things that give you true insight and understanding.

I know after that, that I had reached the full extent of my emotional response. After that I was just absorbing myself and trying to grasp the scale of the horror.

I thought the whole day was extremely well organised – so many congratulations to everyone concerned.

I will certainly re-visit this place many times from now on if only in my thoughts and imagination. Thank you.

### **John Gold, Church of Scotland**

I will never, ever be able to comprehend fully the scale, magnitude and horror of the Holocaust. I will never be able to comprehend the mindset of those involved in persecuting their fellow humans, innocent and no different from you or I. I am also ashamedly thankful that I will never ever be able to comprehend the pain, fear, hurt, mentality, exhaustion, incredible bravery, fighting spirit and will to go on which victims and survivors felt.

I will never be able to fully comprehend any of the above. I will however carry in my head thoughts, images and experiences which this one day visit has provided me with, enabling me to gain an incredibly distant yet frighteningly realistic understanding of the events which occurred in Poland only 60 years ago.

I will remember the stock piles of hair, shoes, suitcases. I will remember being unable to grasp the scale and horror of conditions in the camps. I will remember approaching Birkenau, its eerie stillness and the low mist which formed.

I will remember. Surely that is the purpose of this visit. I will never forget.

### **Steve Mallon, Church of Scotland**

This has been an extraordinary day, but it is difficult to describe it because every word I think of is inadequate. There are few words that we can use to describe the full horror of what we say today.

My first reaction at Auschwitz was just how tidy it all looked. It was as though it had been cleaned up so that the full horror of what went on there was somehow diminished. The day really began for me at Birkenau where the reality of the sheer and utter atrocity of what went on there really hit home.

We witnessed the remains of a ruthlessly efficient killing machine – one that stripped the humanity from everyone involved. I can imagine how people died there but I can barely grasp how people could live.

I was amazed and disgusted at just how much was taken from people – especially the hair. I can scarcely take that in.

Other things I will remember are the numbers e.g. the fact that in Krakow there used to be 70,000 Jews there and now hardly enough to keep a Synagogue going.

I was also amazed at how close everything was to town and cannot believe that people in the surrounding community could say they knew nothing of what was going on. And I feel a sense of shame that our country didn't do enough to help and even more so that it continues to refuse to help those who flee their homes out of fear.

We will try to do more to help youth workers and young people in the Church of Scotland to become more aware of this story so that they can be part of a different story and make a better future for us all.

### **Kevin Lowden, SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow**

I have read a lot about the Holocaust and watched many documentaries. This visit was far more powerful and informative. Obviously, physically standing where so many people were murdered, looking at the many possessions and seeing images of those killed is able to convey the horror in a far more tangible way. It was truly unforgettable. For me, the most moving parts of the day was standing in the Auschwitz gas chamber, seeing children's shoes among the vast number of footwear and the hair taken from those murdered. These experiences were so visceral. Finally, the guide's detailed description of the experiences of Jewish people in the "barracks" and the horrors visited upon them has reinforced my resolve to never forget and to be vigilant against racism and intolerance. I have been evaluating an innovative school-based programme in North Lanarkshire which was based on a one day conference to challenge religious and racial intolerance. Various schools and students of different faiths were involved and many were on today's visit. I hope this experience also provides an unshakable determination to address intolerance and bigotry in all its forms.

Thank you for facilitating such a successful and memorable visit. It is now up to schools, their partners and politicians to reinforce the message of today's event.

### **Ernest Munro, Royal British Legion Scotland**

Walking through the gate at Auschwitz felt strange and seeing the railway lines at Birkenau also.

Leaving the camps left a lump in my throat the visit was more vivid than expected, and so very very sad. An unforgettable experience.

### **Corrie Martin, Journalist, Real Radio**

I don't remember ever feeling luckier than when I was walking up the rail tracks towards the exit of Birkenau.

I expected to be horrified by what I saw on this trip, but nothing I imagined came close to the multitude of emotions I felt. The anxiety and revulsion I experienced in the first gas chamber at Auschwitz, the way I felt my skin crawl as I saw a perfectly preserved plait amongst the encased mountain of human hair, the shame and anger in the faces around me as we heard how the prisoners were treated – I hope I never forget those moments.

The cold – I’ve never felt anything like it. I’ve been in lower temperatures but this was a biting, oppressive chill that was only partly to do with the weather. Birkenau is the most desolate place I’ve ever seen; deathly quiet, soulless, with every moment of its horrific past reminding you that as you huddle under scarves, hats, gloves and layers of clothes, men and women walked the same steps in thin cotton pyjamas. It was, without doubt, the most humbling experience of my life. So walking towards the gates of Birkenau to board a warm coach was a moment of revelation and massive relief.

It’s hard to pinpoint any single moment whose impact was the greatest, but seeing 40,000 pairs of shoes stacked in a room and realising their owners could all have been exterminated within just four days was horrific. So too were the bunkers at Birkenau where up to 1,000 prisoners would sleep in unimaginable cramped and filthy conditions.

I was lucky enough to meet survivor Ernest Levy earlier this year and I think the knowledge that this heroic articulate man on whose couch I had sat had been subjected to those conditions was the thing that disturbed me most. It didn’t happen to someone else; it happened to Ernest.

I feel so privileged to have been able to come here and have this experience. I cannot urge other people to come strongly enough. None of us should forget what happened to Ernest and millions like him – too many of whom never tasted clean water, fresh food or freedom again.

### **Pauline Padfield, Scottish Traveller Education Programme.**

My first impression, on the bus to Auschwitz, was in relation to Poland – I had not realised the extent of Poland’s treatment by Germany and the Soviet Union. It also seemed to me that the whole shameful degradation that is Auschwitz-Birkenau has unfairly drenched Poland – it also felt like the European Union is a set of institutions that must be cared for.

I am really glad that I joined the visit. My walk and conversation with a Jewish man, who lost family members, five I think, will stay with me forever. It took place as we walked along the selection area beside the

railway line in Birkenau. Later walking back in the dark and intense cold, thinking about the dreadful treatment of prisoners selected to “live”, I tried to get my head around the cold and its life draining impact before lack of food etc.

In my area of work, the promotion and support of education for gypsies and travellers in Scotland, official ‘looking away’ from children’s educational needs does take place – not always, but sufficiently to be of concern for Scotland’s reputation as a racist free society. My time at Auschwitz-Birkenau will help me to challenge this “looking away” – not in a ranting way, but as calmly and carefully as the guide, Daria, told the story of the everyday detail and ultimate scale of this dreadful process. Thank you so much for asking me along.

### **Brian Swanson, Journalist**

Right now I want to hug my children and tell them that living is the most precious gift after seeing with dreadful clarity an evil unimagined. But I will also salute the courage of survivors like Ernest Levy in dedicating his life to reminding us what happened just 6 DECADES AGO.

### **Stanley Grossman, Scottish Friends of Israel**

Having identified more than 70 family members lost in the Holocaust, 7 in Auschwitz of which only 2 survived, I felt it was my responsibility to their memory to visit this hell on earth.

I felt grateful to be able to sign the visitors book at the camp reception area, with the following:

*On behalf of the Bocians, Grossmans and Bursztajns who were unable to sign for themselves.*

### **Angela Hecht**

Having seen a lot of films and read a lot about the Holocaust nothing prepares you for the overwhelming feelings prompted by the visit today. It is absolutely inconceivable that such pain and suffering could be inflicted by one human being to another. The total dehumanising of innocent people beggars belief. My aunt was in the camp and how she survived is nothing short of miraculous and I also understand far better why she was the way she was.

The silence and utter desolation of Birkenau will never leave me and I think the whole experience has been a very worthwhile one but also a very difficult one – I feel sad to the core of my being that humanity has learned nothing in terms of people persecuting others in the name of religion or colour. This is such an important educational tool and was a very well organised trip.

### **George Hecht**

Horrendous – having now seen the camps, it is utterly incomprehensible that man could do such things to man. A reality check of the highest order. The more people experience a visit perhaps this will put into perspective what actually happened and hopefully ensure it is not repeated and people will in future be more tolerant of others and their beliefs.

The feelings I got more so in Birkenau was a cold, lonely, chilling and extremely harrowing experience. It was a feeling unlike anything I have ever experienced. One I will never forget and trust I will learn from this and apply in future in thought and actions.

### **Dr Asifa Hussain**

The visit was excellent and was certainly everything I expected. Auschwitz is a terrible place and we must always remember those murdered in such sick and twisted circumstances. I could almost feel the fear of those poor individuals in the concentration camp. We as a global nation must not allow these atrocities to ever re-occur. Mankind can be very evil and this was evident at Auschwitz-Birkenau. We must all respect people regardless of their colour, creed, ethnicity and religion. Why can't we all live in peace?

### **Alice Tankel**

Having been to the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Imperial War Museum etc. today's experience was quite different for various reasons.

- 1) This was where it happened – not a gathering together of material – the site where these atrocities took place.
- 2) You felt the cold, you saw with you own eyes the conditions people lived in.
- 3) The planning that went into this whole cruel event, yet even after seeing all these things it beggars belief that a so-called civilised society could undertake such evil. Man's inhumanity to man is unbelievable. My

feelings are indescribable, but these feelings have to be shared with others.

I would like to say that Jim Murphy and Ken Macintosh have to be commended for arranging this trip to educate young people. This is the only way there is a chance for the future.

I would hope that German young people are also going to Auschwitz to see what happened in their parents or grandparents lifetime.

It has been a long day, I am glad I went and I will never forget it for the rest of my life. I hope all the young people in the group feel the same.

### **Albert Tankel**

I did not for one moment realise the vastness, nor the totally organised cruelty imposed by the Germans. In my opinion the total horror of the camps cannot be blamed only on the Nazis.

Without actually visiting the camps it is impossible to envisage the enormity and cruelty of it all.

The sincerity and dedication of both Rabbi Marcus and Jim Murphy, along with their excellent and appropriate words certainly made this a day that will be remembered for the rest of my life.

### **Irene Yona**

First may I thank you for allowing me to join this Party to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Very sad to see how brutal people were and also disgusted that the world stood by and did nothing to stop the atrocities that took place. This trip is well worth continuing as every school should remember what happened. Reflecting back I can see the gas chambers, the piles of hair, shoes, suit cases and all the horrific things that these poor innocent people had to endure. I found very moving the prayers and the lighting of the memorial candles. Also very pleased that the Government is giving money towards the Holocaust Educational Trust for education purposes.



If you would like to participate in future visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau, organised by Jim Murphy MP and Ken Macintosh MSP, please write to East Renfrewshire Parliamentary Office, 238 Ayr, Road, Newton Mearns, G77 6AA.

Additional copies of "Personal Reflections" are available at £5.00 each. Cheques payable to "Holocaust Educational Trust" should be sent to East Renfrewshire Parliamentary Office at the above address. All proceeds will go towards the funding of future visits.



*First they came for the Jews  
and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew*

*Then they came for the communists  
and I did not speak out – because I was not a communist*

*Next they came for the trade unionists  
and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist*

*Then they came for me  
and there was no one left to speak out for me*

Pastor Neimoeller

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