

Elana Burack

How do you reflect on an experience such as this? How do you summarize life itself? How do you summarize the antithesis of life itself? It's not possible. I'm honestly not sure where to start with this reflection. Before the trip, I felt overwhelmed by emotions and anxieties. I was worried that Poland--more specifically, the camps--would change me. I am very aware of the fact that I go about life wearing rose-colored glasses. I *like* to see the good in people. I *choose* to try to give people the benefit of the doubt. Caution is, of course, essential, but overall, I find life much more pleasant (for myself and for others) when I go about it in this way.

Going to Auschwitz, I feared, would steal this worldview from me. In my mind, it is the worst place on earth. How could I go there and not be changed? How could I go there and still see the good in people? How could I go there and still *choose* to see the good in people?

And yet, I think the visit ended up having the opposite effect on me. In fact, while we were there, it hit me at a very particular moment. We were about to walk into the reconstructed gas chambers at Birkenau and were instructed to maintain silence. There was even a sign that asked people to remain silent to honor the victims. And yet, as we walked in, I heard the people behind me chatting in another language. I suddenly became so infuriated. How could they talk at a moment like this? Did they not see the sign? Could their conversation really not wait just a few moments? This particular moment was something I had thought about for a long time--the feeling of walking into a gas chamber. And they were ruining it for me I felt. I shushed them. Instead of concentrating on being in that place, my focus was shifted to them and my anger. This was not what I wanted out of this moment.

And then, suddenly, the thought overwhelmed me: How could I *possibly* feel this anger, this frustration, this *intolerance* in *this* place? How could I let myself be influenced by the very feelings and thoughts that formed the very bedrock, that were the very seedlings of all that had happened there? I immediately felt some feeling wash over me--Regret? Sadness? Self-realization? Awareness? I don't know. But what I did know was that I could no longer harbor those feelings of frustration. I had to let them go.

It is that moment that has shaped the lesson that I took away from the experience: empathy. There is simply no room for more frustration, more judgement, more intolerance, more hatred in this world. There is simply no room for unkind interpretations of one's behavior, of thoughtless assignation of blame. It is all too easy for us to push the problems onto the Other, onto anything outside of ourselves. But in reality, so much comes from the inside. Having this experience has inspired me to see others with a deep sense of compassion and to be generous in considering a possible context for their actions.

In talking about this to my parents, my jet-lagged brain likened empathy to a set of mirrors. We have all stood between two mirrors that face each other and seen the infinite reflections bouncing back and forth from one mirror to the other. To me, this is just like empathy--a never-ending, unbroken chain of reflections and interpretations. In looking at the Other, one sees the self. And in identifying the self within the Other, one can see the Other more fully. There is no end to the process. One can never fully be the Other; one can never fully *see* the Other. And yet, as the reflections multiply, it becomes harder and harder to distinguish which reflection comes from where. They are profoundly entwined--as are we.

To make this more concrete, I'll use an example from the past weeks. My friend called me in a panicked state. She was very angry at one of her friends and used some harsh language in talking about him. I was taken aback and started thinking about her friend and how stressed and overwhelmed he must be right now. I wanted to jump in and tell her that that wasn't nice of her. Then, I started thinking how difficult this situation must be for her and that her words were coming from a place of stress and frustration. And on and on it goes...There is always more to understand. There is always another perspective. There is always another way, a deeper way, to reflect the truth.

While we were there, surrounded by the sights and sounds of a bustling, very alive city juxtaposed with memorials and monuments marking the death that consumed the same spaces at one point, I thought a lot about the balance: How do you not get sucked into the sadness of the place and yet not forget the events of it either? How do you walk the line between living *in* the past and living *from* the past? For me, empathy is part of the answer. It's a way to acknowledge what happened, to learn from it, and to then to live *better* because of it.

One of the most redemptive parts of the trip for me was seeing how others are working hard to preserve this past so that people can continue to learn and grow from it. The scholars and conservationists and the entire team of dedicated staff at JHI were such an inspiration. To see them, as non-Jews, doing the work of preserving such an important history was remarkable. They are committed to the work of *humanizing*. The archives with their drawings, their handwritten notes, their intimate stories--they *demand* empathy. One document had written at the bottom: "Remember my name." I am sorry to say that I no longer remember the name, but I walked away feeling that there were so many names to remember, so many individuals and their stories and their talents that died with them. Just thinking about them as having diaries, having drawings, children, families--rather than thinking about them as a number--that makes a big difference.

There is, of course, so much more to discuss, to think about, to wonder, to question. We can ask ourselves how people can learn to be so cruel. We can ask ourselves if people are inherently good or bad. We can ask ourselves if things all happen for a reason. We can ask ourselves how people found the will to survive. We can ask ourselves if Israel can provide some sort of light. We can ask ourselves how so many could stay so silent. We can ask ourselves how so many could stay so loud. We can ask ourselves why someone would want to drown out the voices of so many. We can ask ourselves what those voices would have said.

...But these are all questions that will always be unanswered. These are all questions that we will never fully comprehend. The words of one of the JHI staff members linger in my mind: You can't try to apply logic to hate--hatred is not logical. It's impossible not to ask why, and yet, it's impossible to ever know why. What we *can* do now, and where we *can* go from here isn't easily answerable either--'never again's feel so hopeless in the face of the Rwanda genocide. What *can* we do? What can *I* do? Empathy isn't enough. I'm not sure anything will ever be enough. But for now, it's where I am going to start.

Rachel Perlstein

The Oneg Shabbat Program truly taught me a lot and I walked away having enjoyed it a lot more than I would have originally thought. I have come away with a better understanding of Jewish history both before and during the war. I also know a lot more about the shape of Judaism in Polish culture and the forms in which that relationship takes today.

When hearing about Poland, all my previous education and Jewish education focused entirely on the concentration camps. Obviously, I understood that many Jews lived in Poland before because, but I did not fully understand what my history education was glossing over on this subject. Not only had I been missing hundreds of years of rich Jewish history, but I was not capturing the full extent of the hardships the Jewish people faced every day during the war. My realization towards this really struck with the tour of the Ringelblum Archive Exhibition. The many documents there were completely new territory for me. The described hardships that the people faced every day, like starvation and poverty, were not known to me in the extent that they should have been. I now understand the true scope of the horror of the time beyond just people being slaughtered in camps and facing terrible labor conditions, but people in their own home cities/ghettos were facing unimaginable hardships daily. Seeing the documents of these people, looking at what they chose to bury, made these emotions real and palpable for me. Furthermore, it makes me think about the true scale of the lives lost. This was buried as a means for them to try and preserve their lives and memories, and while I was there and as I think back, I cannot help but wonder about all the people whose lives were completely lost. Those in the Ringelblum archive would have died nameless and faceless if it were not for the archive and the archive being discovered. There must be tons more who will never get the basic right of being remembered, people within other ghettos, camps, and people of other tragedy throughout history. In addition, I also cannot help but to question the existence of other archive like things that too carry information, emotion, and memory. One thing that was discussed was the potential “third milk can” that was hiding somewhere, and again there could be so many of these buried archives in many places that have not and will probably never be discovered. How many people have been remembered out of the many more who died?

Such similar ideas were also very real for me when touring Auschwitz and going through the places of the many items that were collected. The tour guide explained that this was an extremely small fraction of the total that was collected because most things were burned, and yet it was still so much stuff. How many people must have gone through there whose names were on suitcases, or other items, only to get burned later? How many people’s hair will remain in that heap without ever knowing again who it belonged to? These items did not capture the emotions and daily hardships of those in the way the Ringelblum archives did, but it was good visual representation of all those whose memory were preserved and the more who were lost. A good visual representation and element of the questions I was walking away from the Ringelblum archive with, and questions that I still am trying to conceptualize.

As I mentioned before, my previous Holocaust knowledge was almost entirely on the life of those in concentration camps. Just as I had not learned about the extent of the hardships of Jewish life beyond these, I had not learned anything about the difficulties the Polish population faced during the war. Although these are not as drastic as what was faced by the Jewish people, I appreciated the museums

we went to, like the museum in Schindler's factory, which better captured the difficulties faced by all, and not just the Jews, during the Nazi occupation of the war. Another example of this was learning about the Warsaw uprising, different from the Warsaw ghetto Uprising, and just understanding that it was so bad for the people of Warsaw that they on their own were motivated to fight.

Moving away from the Holocaust and World War II, as I stated in the beginning, I learned a lot about Judaism from before and after the war. I now am beginning to understand the scope of which Jewish history and Polish history are intertwined. The Polin museum was a great way to start with this and discussing the vast diversity and culture of Jews in Poland. I also loved the Auschwitz Jewish Center and seeing the old preserved synagogue in the museum and hearing about the relationships of the people there. Just a general note is that I was super inspired by the amount of effort and care that is put into protecting the Jewish memory, especially by those who are not Jewish. Hearing their stories and motivations was super interesting and I found it to be a positive underlying theme of the whole trip which helped especially when a lot of the trip's content is so dark and heavy.

Another positive theme I found to be in learning about the shape of Judaism today in Poland. I extremely enjoyed our visit to the Krakow JCC and really enjoyed talking to the people of the Warsaw JCC. Hearing about the identity of the people there was so different than anything we see in America, and it made me realize how Judaism, at its core, is much more similar across the United States than I had thought. I did not realize the true diversity of shapes that Judaism could take across the globe. It is so weird to me that many people who are so active in the Jewish community are not technically fully Jewish. What is even weirder to me is hearing about how in Krakow there are so many people who are still learning they are Jewish and trying to connect with that part of their identity. It is not only weird to think about there are people around who have no idea of their Jewish identity but to think that there are older people who are unable and do not know how to tell their children and grandchildren of their Jewish identity. It is also super interesting to me to see the Judaism as a culture and identity rather than as a traditional, religious practice. To me they have always seemed so intertwined. It has had me reevaluating the aspects of my Jewish identity and culture and think about in what ways do I define my Judaism and what aspects of Judaism do I enjoy most and want to most partake in. Again, I find the people there so inspiring to see them so open and warm about being Jewish when historically there has been a horrible recent history there. To see the buildup of the JCCs in Warsaw and Krakow as symbolic of the buildup of Jewish life and culture there is again extremely inspiring and another positive theme throughout the trip.

All in all, I very much enjoyed the experience between seeing Poland and meeting new people it was all very fun and exciting. My biggest takeaways were what I have discussed in this paper as to learning so much about Judaism before and during the war, and also what it looks like today. I realize and understand now that I had no idea what Jewish life was like in places outside the concentration camps at the time, and while I had discussed that Judaism existed in Poland long before World War II, I did not understand the diversity and vibrancy of life that existed there. Now, with the understanding of what life was like before I think I finally better understand the full effects of the war on Jewish culture. To see such life there before that does not exist there now, was disheartening at times and hard to conceptualize. I now get the loss of culture and people that cannot ever be replaced. However, I do find

the effort to preserve the memory of these people extremely inspiring and I am excited and again inspired by the growing Jewish communities we see there today.

Sonia Reardon

This trip to Poland was a truly unforgettable experience. Going in to it I didn't have much time to process or anticipate what I was going to experience because I was so preoccupied with school work until we boarded the plane. I did think a bit about Jewish life in Poland and I assumed that it was like what my experience has been of Jewish culture in the US, where for the most part there are a lot of Jewish people and there isn't societal stigma surrounding them/us.

When we arrived, my first impressions were that Warsaw was like any other city, with large office buildings and a metropolitan feel. I had only ever learned about Poland in the context of the war, so for some reason I pictured a society reminiscent of how it was in the 1930s. As we began learning about what had happened where we stood, I felt a sense of surrealness. Something seemed wrong about standing where the old synagogue had been destroyed during Nazi occupation, and passing a restaurant on the bottom floor.

Starting the trip at the Jewish Historical Institute was an interesting way to dive right in to what the rest of the week was going to hold. We learned about the Ringelblum archive, a story that has both baffled and inspired me since. I have found myself sharing about the archive with everyone I talk about the trip to, because I am just so surprised it isn't more widely known about. It seems that so much of what society knows about the life of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto comes from these recovered documents, but no one knows the story.

The walking tours all gave more context to what we were learning from the documents, and I again felt a strange sense of the contrast between what happened on those streets 80 years ago, and what I was experiencing in the moment. As we continued to meet people, I began to have the realization that what I was expecting from Warsaw with respect to modern Jewish life was entirely false. It was surprising but understandable that hardly anyone working in the Jewish Historical Institute or at the JCC were Jewish. Even for those that were, there seemed to be more of a sense of cultural Jewry rather than religious. However, everyone that we met clearly cared so much about preserving Jewish heritage and memory, and it was great to learn all of the history and knowledge that they possessed. I think I learned the most when just walking between events because I could ask the guides questions that were more specific to what I was confused about.

Krakow holds an entirely different feel in my memory from Warsaw. Krakow is more of what I picture from a European city, seemingly more quaint and medieval. I really enjoyed Krakow as a city, and the walking tour that we did there was incredibly valuable for me to see the area, and the specific locations each held such interesting history. Yet another contrast was that between the lively city of Krakow and the nearby Oświęcim. My experience at Auschwitz is something I still have yet to fully process and understand. I consistently found myself questioning how the extremes of what happened could have possibly happened, and then I found myself thinking of all of the similar situations happening in the

world today to marginalized communities. Something I have been struggling with is the concept of “never again,” because this is something we say to make ourselves feel like we can conclude the Holocaust, but realistically it is happening now and there is seemingly nothing an individual like myself can do about it.

Since being home, I have found that it is incredibly rewarding to share my experiences with friends and peers, because there is so much knowledge that I acquired on this trip that I never would have known, and that my friends are now so interested in learning about. If I can do nothing on a larger scale, at least I can share about the Ringelblum archive and my experiences in Poland meeting the amazing people we did, and remembering the lives of those we could not.

Isabella Reynolds

To visit Poland is to live its history. Every step taken is charged with meaning. It is impossible to walk the streets without the constant knowledge that if we had been there eighty years earlier, we would have been trapped behind its Ghetto walls. It started small but escalated quickly, the never-ending attempt to strip the Jewish people of their humanity and exterminate them. Taking their money, their property, their clothes, their glasses, their prosthetics, their hair, their liberty, their brothers and sisters, wives and husbands, sons and daughters, their lives. So many ways to die; the starvation, the weather, the beatings, the random and merciless shootings, the gas chambers. Part of our trip included walking through a gas chamber. Had we walked into the gas chamber then, we would have been trapped and died. Every site we visit is the site of some great tragedy, but through this tragedy, great heroes emerged who plea for us to never forget what happened to them less than a century ago. Heroes like Dawid Graber, Nachum Grzywacz, and the Lichtensztajn family. Contributors and strategic hidens of the Emanuel Ringelblum archives, chronicling Jewish life in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Nazi occupation of Poland.

Dawid Graber and Nachum Grzywacz were both 19 years old, one year younger than I am. They died during the Great Deportation from Warsaw to the Treblinka extermination camp. Together with their former headmaster, Izrael Lichtensztajn they hid the archives in their old school house. They lived under conditions of great uncertainty, fear and anxiety, yet their greatest fear was not the death that awaited them but to die and be forgotten. Nahum Grzywacz wrote “I don’t know what fate awaits me. I don’t know if I’ll be able to tell you what happens next. Remember: my name is Nachum Grzywacz.” Gela Seksztajn, Izrael Lichtensztajn’s wife similarly wrote “I do not ask for praise, only for me and my daughter to be remembered. This talented little girl is named Margolit Lichtensztajn” and included a drawing of herself and her daughter. While it is deeply unsettling to hear these stories, our duty to learn, remember, and educate is undeniable.

Amazingly, despite such terrible atrocities, the Jewish people were able to meet death with peace and even happiness. In a letter dropped from a train bound for Auschwitz, the writer used the code words “going to a wedding,” a happy occasion used as code for going to his death or going to meet God. Despite the chaos and terror of the circumstances, Dawid and Gela were able to find peace, knowing that their stories would be preserved and read by future generations. Dawid wrote, “What we couldn’t

scream out to the world we buried in the ground. I don't want thanks! That's not what I spent my life and my energy for. I would like to live to see the moment when it will be possible to unearth this great treasure and shout out the truth. Let the world know, let those who didn't have to go through this rejoice. But we stand little chance of surviving and that is why I am writing this testament. May this treasure fall into good hands, may it survive until better times, may it alarm the world to what happened in the 20th century....Now we can die in peace... Our mission has been accomplished... Let history bear witness to that." Gela also wrote "I am at peace now. I must die but I've done what I had to do. I'd like the memory of my painting to survive. Goodbye, my colleagues and friends, goodbye, the Jewish people! Do not allow such destruction ever to happen again."

I will never forget this Penn in Poland experience. It continuously enters my thoughts and my dreams and will continue to do so throughout my life. When I brush my hair how can I not remember the mountains of hair, something so personal that it contains the DNA of each victim, simply cut from their lives? When I have children of my own and I get them ready for school in the morning or take off their shoes before bed, how will I not remember the little shoes of murdered children? Each life so precious. Taken. How can we truly respect the memories of all these victims? For every story we read, how many thousands have we not read? For every story remembered, how many thousands forgotten? It's so easy to get trapped in all the terrible things that happened in less than a decade of history. Replaying it over and over again in your head. Mourning the immense evil that characterized WWII. How can we move forward?

We must remember the faith of those who fought bitterly to the end and the heroic efforts of those who put everything on the line to preserve this history which we are blessed to inherit. We must never forget what happened through the stories recorded for posterity, recorded for us. They were a source of hope and purpose for the authors and they are a source of hope and purpose for us now. As Oneg Szabat ambassadors, we are charged not only to popularize the history of the Warsaw Ghetto archives but to proclaim what is good and right and true. We must cherish what we have now and fight to preserve it, confident that though battles may be lost along the way, in the end the good, the right, and the true will prevail. We will win the war.

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." Ephesians 6:12-20

Rachel Steinig

“Earth, earth, do not cover our blood and let our cry be heard everywhere!” - Abraham Lewin, 9/21/1942. When I read this quote at the JHI Archive, I took a long, deep breath. I was struck by the thought that everything returns to the earth. The ashes of the six million buried bodies enter the earth. Our ancestors bodies’ join the blood of the planet. They grow into trees. Grasslands. Jungles. In this way our massacres are always with us and we can never forget. The earth is a sacred womb holding our memories and secrets and stories. The ashes, bodies, archives and souls are made up of atoms. These atoms, energy and water cycle through the earth and atmosphere. We drink water that is millions of years old.

I took another deep breath. I realized that while in Poland, I felt at home. I am home wherever I travel because I am always held by mother earth, my ancestors, my body and my breath. I am home in Poland. I am in the land of my ancestors. I learn their stories. While the buildings feel exotic, something about this country doesn’t feel new to me. Warsaw is a city that was reborn from the rubble and ashes. Like a phoenix. Cycles of life. A city reborn from death. Krakow feels eerily familiar. I can imagine my grandmother living here in their family’s small flat that they occupied after they fled their farm outside of Stryj. I walk the streets of my ancestors.

Auschwitz. The wind was so strong. Sand and gravel blowing into my eyes. Cases of human hair. Walking down the steps into the gas chamber. It only took five cases of cyanide pellets to kill 2,000 people at once. 12,000 people died each day at Birkenau. Their ashes were dumped into the small pools of water and into the nearby river. Piles of suitcases, glasses, and toothbrushes. The courtyard where political prisoners were shot. I squinted my eyes in the bright sun as I stared at the double-layered wall to catch the bullets and absorb the blood of those shot. Barbed wire everywhere. Medical experiments on children. Cutting open dead twins. Things so horrific my mind tried to block them out. So many train tracks. Our tour was 3 hours long. 75% of the people who came to Auschwitz-Birkenau were only there for 1 hour 15 minutes. Then they were murdered.

This is my history. I don’t want it to be. My grandfather and great uncle jumping off a train headed to a death camp. Having to find their way back home through the forest. My grandmother Lili being taken in by a Christian family, getting fake papers. Lili talking back to a German police officer who accused her Christian friend of being Jewish. My great uncle and great grandparents hiding in a hole in a cellar for a year. They had to bury the body of their companion in the cold, dark earth right next to them in the cellar. Everything returns to the earth.

I entered my ancestors names at Auschwitz to see if any of them had been there. The response I received was “due to frequency of the surname Edelstein, we kindly ask you to provide us with the names, and if possible, with the dates and places of birth of the people you are looking for.” So many people with my family’s last name were at Auschwitz. I don’t know anything about them. So many died. It’s unfathomable. I now understand why so many people in my family have mental illnesses and have suffered from addiction. Trauma is literally encoded into my family’s DNA. I don’t want a family history of trauma and genocide.

But thinking about the resilience and opportunities that my family have been afforded is inspiring. My grandparents were refugees and Holocaust survivors. My dad (their son) grew up in poverty. I grew up middle class. I'm attending an Ivy League university. I'm traveling the world. I'm so lucky. So blessed. My ancestors would be so happy for me. I feel their smiles when I twirl in a meadow of flowers. When I jump in the ocean. When I walk through the forest. They are with me.

Auschwitz is one of the most horrible places on earth. Walking through the open fields of Birkenau, I felt numb. I couldn't speak. All I could do was listen to the wind whistling through the trees. My soul was sad. But I was present. Whenever I was overwhelmed I connected to my breath. I empathized but still kept up boundaries. I didn't feel shattered. I journeyed through the dark forest and entered the light. I felt grounded and connected to the earth. The earth is G-d. My breath is G-d. I stood on the ground that absorbed the ashes of 1 million people. The earth was present long before the Shoah and will be present long after. Mother Earth is quiet and still and calm and always there. She absorbs the blood and the ashes and the tears. As Dawid Graber wrote, "What we couldn't scream out to the world we buried in the ground."

If I had lived in Poland 75 years ago, I probably would have died. The only thing that separates me from the victims is time. As I walked out of Auschwitz, I felt a strong desire to go back to Israel, or my Jewish community at home. Just to be around Jews dancing, eating hummus, or playing klezmer music. My synagogue feels like home. I am so proud to be Jewish. I want to be defiant and unequivocal about my Judaism.

Antisemitism is on the rise again. Squirrel Hill. The rise of the alt-right and neo-nazis. Charlottesville. On the bus back from Auschwitz I softly sing to myself "Kol Ha'Olam Kulo".

Kol ha'olam kulo

Gesher tzar me'od

Veha'ikar lo lifached k'lal.

The whole world

Is a very narrow bridge

and the main thing to recall is to have no fear at all.

But I didn't feel comforted. To say I'm not afraid would be denying my true feelings. I am afraid. I don't believe that "never again" is really true. Genocide keeps happening. One of the most important lessons I've internalized from this trip is not to be indifferent. We need to stand up to injustice and to stand up for other people. Empathy and taking responsibility of others in hard times is necessary. I decide to embrace the fear and grow from it. I look out the window of the bus as we journey through rural Poland. We travel through the dark forest and into the light. I take a deep breath and begin to journal. I write: "I will dedicate my career to human rights. I will acknowledge my deep wisdom. My soul knows deep truths. I will take risks and step out of my comfort zone. I will grow." I remember the quote from Gela Seksztajn in the Ringelblum Archive. "I am at peace now. I must die but I've done what I had to do." When I die, I want to be at peace. I want to know that I've dedicated my life to fighting injustice. It's the least I can do. Any less would be to deny my humanity.

Gregory Whitehorn

The Overwhelming Grief

In the main exhibit of the Ringelblum archive, there lies a note written by Oneg Shabbat member Dawid Graber. It reads:

“What we couldn’t scream out to the world we buried in the ground. I don’t want thanks! That’s not what I spent my life and my energy for. I would like to live to see the moment when it will be possible to unearth this great treasure and shout out the truth. Let the world know, let those who didn’t have to go through this rejoice....

But we stand little chance of surviving and that is why I am writing this testament. May this treasure fall into good hands, may it survive until better times, may it alarm the world to what happened in the 20th century.

Now we can die in peace...

Our mission has been accomplished...

Let history bear witness to that.”

The year is now 2019 and many of the artifacts of the Ringelblum archive have, in fact, survived. Many of the letters and writings of the Oneg Shabbat are currently on display and the more fragile pieces are being restored. Today, this archive serves to educate the world about the tragedies of the Holocaust and of the Warsaw Ghetto.

When I read Graber’s note for the first time at the Jewish Historical Institute, I immediately felt pride. I felt this way because I realized that I was helping to fulfill Graber’s mission. I was happy to play a part in continuing the legacy of Dawid Graber and the rest of the Oneg Shabbat. And yet, intermixed with my pride and happiness was a pang of sadness. I examined the articles of the archive and I knew the truth. The truth was painful for me to bear. I could see the horrors facing the Jews that lived in the Warsaw Ghetto in my mind. I could feel the unbearable pain of separated families, of starving children lining the Ghetto streets, of brothers and sisters taken away by Nazi traincars never to be seen again. I always knew the Warsaw Ghetto and the Holocaust were devastating for the Jewish people, for my people. I did not realize how much seeing the Ringelblum archive in person, seeing Auschwitz in person, would leave me with such emptiness.

The mixture of emotions I felt after reading Graber’s note was overwhelming. I sat down because I did not know what else to do and my brain was processing too much. Even today, weeks after leaving Poland, it is difficult for me to spend a lot of time thinking about the trip. I do not know how to feel.

I am so pleased that the Ringelblum archive carries on the legacy of Polish Jews. I am amazed at progress of the JCC Warsaw and JCC Krakow and the willingness of volunteers to support these community centers. And what is sad is that I lose all of this positivity when I think about Auschwitz. I just feel a huge hole with the missing futures of all of the victims that died there. I think about all that these

people were going to become. While I am hopeful for the future, the past is hard to come to grapple with.

While living in the Warsaw Ghetto, Adam Czerniaków wrote in his diary “At night I read a lot, constantly envying all the heroes of my novels because they lived in different times” (December 26th, 1939). Books have a great power to, even for a moment, change the world around you. What is interesting is that sometimes I do the same thing. I love reading Harry Potter because it takes me away from whatever pains me in my daily life. This leads to my next point: me and Adam Czerniaków myself are not really that different. We were perhaps born 80 years apart, but it could have been me in his shoes and perhaps his in mine. This is a mindset that I think could be of great benefit to current society. Some people are born rich or poor, in better times or worse, but things easily could have been the other way around. It is easy to ignore the plight of others who are different for one reason or another. The ability to empathize, to see the negative treatment of others as something that could have happened (or will happen) to you, and to act on this empathy, go a long way in making the world a better place.

Like Dawid Graber said, the Ringelblum archive truly is a treasure. It is a written history of the Warsaw Ghetto, of the Holocaust, from the perspective of the Jewish people. The archive is a symbol of pain and loss. It is also a miracle. It is now in the hands of people that treat it with the respect and dignity the archive authors never received. The archive serves as a reminder to us all: that it is our duty to make sure these terrors of history are not repeated. How we should approach this duty warrants further discussion.