

body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves in the direction of the electrified fence. The electric voices began to chatter wildly. "Maamaa, maaa-maaa," they all hummed together. How far Magda was from Rosa now, across the whole square, past a dozen barracks, all the way on the other side! She was no bigger than a moth.

All at once Magda was swimming through the air. The whole of Magda traveled through loftiness. She looked like a butterfly touching a silver vine. And the moment Magda's feathered round head and her pencil legs and balloonish belly and zigzag arms splashed against the fence, the steel voices went mad in their growling, urging Rosa to run and run to the spot where Magda had fallen from her flight against the electrified fence; but of course Rosa did not obey them. She only stood, because if she ran they would shoot, and if she tried to pick up the sticks of Magda's body they would shoot, and if she let the wolf's screech ascending now through the ladder of her skeleton break out, they would shoot; so she took Magda's shawl and filled her own mouth with it, stuffed it in and stuffed it in, until she was swallowing up the wolf's screech and tasting the cinnamon and almond depth of Magda's saliva; and Rosa drank Magda's shawl until it dried.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the conflict between Rosa and Stella?
2. Why does Rosa not go after Magda? What do her actions convey about life in the camp?
3. What do you think the shawl in the story symbolizes?

1988

BY VALERIE JAKOBER FURTH

Valerie Jakober Furth (1926–) was born in Czechoslovakia into an Orthodox Jewish family. The Germans occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, and Jewish families immediately felt the full weight of Nazi policies. In 1944, Furth's entire family was sent to Auschwitz. Thirty-six members of the family died before the camp was evacuated in January 1945. In 1988, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which sponsors an annual trip to Auschwitz, asked Furth as a survivor to accompany a group going to see the remains of the camps, which are now a memorial. "1988" is Furth's account of her journey back.

This year I returned to Auschwitz. However, now I stayed only six hours, on a cold and dreary March afternoon. I came with sixteen other people, including my husband, who were part of a tour sponsored by the Simon Wiesenthal Center. The tour is a yearly affair, and the center tries on each trip to take at least one survivor of the death camps. Of our group, I was that survivor.

Why had I decided to return? In the months after I finally told the center to include us on the trip, this

question flitted in and out of my head. I answered it by saying that my art was at a standstill: on the one hand, when I painted the Holocaust, something was missing. On the other hand, when I tried to escape from my experience, I made pretty pictures. Neither was an acceptable possibility. Perhaps I needed to rekindle my anger at what had happened to me and those I had loved at Auschwitz and the other camps. Lately, I had felt it diminishing, and though in one way this was good, I also felt that there were still too many blanks in my memory. If I were really to come to terms with Auschwitz, then I needed to confront it again.

These were the reasons I gave myself for going in the months before our departure, when I thought at all about what I had embarked on. Most of the time, however, life flowed on comfortably, and what awaited me seemed far away.

On the one-hour bus trip from Cracow to Auschwitz, my feelings changed. I had been asked by Rhonda, the director of the Wiesenthal Center in New York, who accompanied us, to say a few words. Back in the hotel, the speech I had prepared seemed quite satisfactory, but now on the bus I had difficulty speaking because, as we sped through the countryside, pictures of camp life began, like photographs in a darkroom, to enlarge in my mind. And as they succeeded one another in a silent progression, I wanted desperately to feel what I had felt when I first passed through the gates of Auschwitz—as I stood waiting on endless lines to use the latrines, as I lay huddled on my bunk in Barrack C. So, instead of my prepared speech, I said a few words and sat down.

We passed through the gate. Had there been brick buildings in that Auschwitz? All the structures I remembered had been of wood. No, this is not where I had lived and most of my family had died. But there was the crematorium chimney, the look-out towers (but hadn't they been wooden too?), and the barbed wire. Where

was I? Meanwhile, the young Polish woman who was our guide had joined us and began talking. She was cool, detached, brisk, and I disliked her immediately. Her voice and manner grated on me. How dare she talk statistics; it was my brother, my nephews, my aunts she was reducing to numbers. (On the night before, I had counted up thirty-six members of my immediate family who had died in the camps.) Impatiently, I broke into the guide's patter.

"Where was C Camp, Barracks 26?" I asked. Her smooth progression interrupted, she became annoyed.

"Camp C was in Birkenau. We'll go there after the museum."

Two other groups were in the dark cool museum with us: a crowd of German tourists and some Hasidim¹ from Israel. A map showed three camps. It was then I recalled that where we had just entered was not the place where I and my family had arrived. The site of the museum had originally housed political prisoners. Until this moment, I had never realized that Camp C, Barracks 26 had been a part of Birkenau.

I asked our guide where the kitchen was on the map. She showed it to me. When I said that I would like to see it, she answered that we would go there after the museum. I had seen many of the pictures on the walls of the museum, but was unprepared for the rush of emotion I felt on looking at the glass cases filled with human hair, toothbrushes, shoes, and suitcases of the camp's inmates. My Aunt Ida's hair, my cousin Nellie's toothbrush, the hiking shoes I had worn at arrival, the backpack my mother carried with her to camp. . . . Were they somewhere in these desolate piles of human debris?

Our last stop in the museum was the small room of eternal light. As I knelt down and lit candles, their flames

¹ Hasidim—members of a Jewish sect founded in the 1700s in Poland. Hasidim believe in mysticism and emphasize religious piety and devotion over formal learning.

came up and with them, my life in the Auschwitz inferno rose up too, the flames licking but not burning the images of lost ones from my mind. I felt my husband's hand on my shoulder. Deeply affected, he too was mourning the death of loved ones—the father and stepmother who had vanished in the Nazi night.

After the museum, we got on the bus for our ride to Birkenau. Once again, we entered through an iron gate, but this time I knew where I was. A field, wooden barracks, a brick chimney told me that, after nearly forty years, I had found the way back to my Auschwitz.

Again, I asked the guide, "Where is the kitchen? Where is Camp C?"

She replied that nothing remained of Camp C except some brick chimneys.

"Can we go there anyway?"

"Impossible, the gates are locked. We can, however, see the ruins of the crematorium."

Nothing to be done. As we approached the ruins, the forest, used by the Nazis as a holding place when the crematorium was too full, loomed menacingly. Nearby, I glimpsed a lake, the same lake into which the ashes of the dead had been dumped. But it was Camp C, not them, that holds my attention. I try to zoom in on it with my camera.

"Can we go to the barracks in Camp A?" I ask, already anticipating the No that is the answer.

"We don't have time," the guide says. But, after I tell Rhonda I am not leaving until we stand on that ground, and she had a whispered conversation with the guide, it is decided that we will see the barracks after all.

It is not Barracks 26, Camp C, but all the barracks were identical in their arrangement and structure, so I will have to be content, and as I stand on the barracks floor, for the first time since we arrived I am no longer a tourist. I am cold and hungry; my mother is talking to me with a worried look on her face about food, recipes.

She is praying, she is crying, "Where are my sisters, my brothers?" Beside her, I am vowing, "I won't die, and I won't let her die."

I came back to reality. Now I know why I have returned to Auschwitz: to make sure that what happened to me forty years ago was not a dream, to renew the pledge I made in my art: to grip those who see my work so that they will remember what happened to us and never let it happen again. I look around me at the wooden slats that once held my shivering body. I am ready to leave.

But that night in the hotel room, my head spins with images. One that recurs is of the ditch where I used to get water to wash after it had rained. There had been a rag. How had I ever acquired it? My possessions had been reduced to zero. This small rag was half the size of a handkerchief. I had used it as my washcloth, towel and pillow case.

Theresienstadt, which we visited three days later, looked civil in contrast to Auschwitz. The sky was blue, and we had a new guide—a middle-aged Czech with a human face. Though we were never shown the part of the camp where the Jews were housed, I was not so angry as I had been with the Polish accountant. By the fake cemetery which the Nazis had built to hide the fact that no bodies slept underneath the headstones—for all that remained of these dead were their ashes—we read aloud poems written by the children of Theresienstadt. In this peaceful setting of death, their clear voices, alive to the world's beauty, were unbearably moving.

It is almost a month since I have returned home. Since then, I have wakened each morning with a great heaviness in my body. One day I identify this feeling: It is how I used to feel lying pressed against my mother on the wooden slats that were our beds in Auschwitz.

I have returned home. Patiently, I wait to see how my art will contain the answers to the questions that set me forth on this painful journey back.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did Furth decide to go on the tour of Auschwitz?
2. What most affected Furth on her visit to Auschwitz?
What about those sights and items affected her so strongly?

Buried Homeland

BY AHARON APPELFELD

Aharon Appelfeld (1932–) is one of Israel's foremost writers. Born in Czernovitz in what is now Romania, Appelfeld, as a child, experienced the brutal effects of the Nazi occupation. In 1940, his father was sent to a concentration camp and his mother murdered. Appelfeld escaped from a camp and spent three years in hiding from the Nazi occupiers. In 1946, he was able to immigrate to Palestine, to the region that would become the state of Israel in 1948. As an Israeli, he was unable to travel to his homeland which became part of the Soviet Union after World War II. However, after the collapse of Soviet rule in 1989, the restrictions were lifted and in 1996 Appelfeld returned to the region he grew up in. His essay "Buried Homeland" recounts that journey.

For years, I dreamed about going back to my childhood home, but I didn't, because after the war the region belonged to the Soviet Union and, as an Israeli, I would not have been allowed to enter it. The dream slowly faded, and I reconciled myself to the thought that I would never again see the place where I came into the world.