

In July of 2012, I took a trip to Germany for a conference in Berlin that brings together descendants of Holocaust survivors with descendants of Nazis. Why I decided to take this trip, I didn't know – except that when I was standing in Auschwitz almost 2 years earlier with my parents and my siblings, at the mass grave where so many of my family died, I finally understood the wrong that was done to my family, and made a promise not to forget them. It was the first and only family trip we took to the lands of our fathers, and the first time we knew their stories in detail, after much research that I had personally conducted.

I had worked on making the promise a concrete one – joining several organizations dedicated to remembering the Holocaust that I wholeheartedly supported, including Boston 3G- an organization for 3rd generation of survivors - and speaking at several engagements about my grandparents' experience. However, I felt that it was not enough somehow, and there was deep and troubling pain in my heart, which still could not be resolved. I had heard about the organization that hosts the conference, One by One a few months before, and immediately knew I needed to go. Why – I don't know, but I just knew it.

When I introduced myself at the dialogue group on the first day, I said that I came here as an act of remembrance of my family. That was the most I could say. I could not really expect anything more; I did not know how I would react to the stories of the Germans, or what I would get out of them.

It is very strange, but sometimes you know someone for years, and yet you don't really know them. And sometimes you know someone for a week, and you know them so well, as if you knew them your whole life. This is how I feel about my One by One dialogue group, after having gone through it. If you asked me what I received as being part of this dialogue group, I would say they are 3 important things:

The first thing I received was a very important audience for the telling of the story of my family, which was my act of remembrance. I had an opportunity to tell about my family's suffering and loss to the very same people whose ancestors caused the loss to us. It was a very powerful experience, and I feel that it not only helped me heal, but also my family, who did not even participate directly in the dialogue. But they shared in my experience through my stories, and therefore also became an extended part of the group.

The second thing I received was a deeper understanding of the war and an unexpected connection with the German people. I was able to see a sincere regret for what happened and also suffering and loss, not perhaps of a person or a family because they died, but loss of one's own integrity and identity. It is as if when the Nazis came they did not just kill Jewish people. In their zealotry, they also tainted all that was good about Germany, and now those who are Germans and who were here in the conference cannot feel that they are proud, neither of their country nor of their families. And this loss is quite deep and devastating. We found that we were strangely connected, because although we came from different sides, the war and its effects have shaped us, for better and worse, to our core.

The last and perhaps the most important thing I received was a profound apology for what happened. One may think that a verbal apology, at this time, from a generation after to a generation after, may not be significant, but it was significant for me. I have found Germans (perhaps not most, but at least some)

who deeply care about what has happened and who are committed to remember it and to not let it happen again. And that is all that I can ask for.

Perhaps I will never completely obtain closure on what had happened to my grandparents. I don't think anyone can. There will always remain open questions in my mind about how this could have happened, and why it happened to my family. But I feel more committed and inspired by the memory of my family, and lighter and more energetic in my own life.

Natty, July 2012 Dialogue Group Participant