



Gottfried Alberto Eugenio Auschwitz August 2005

Reflections on Our Trip to Auschwitz in August 2005 by Eugen Florin Wagner – written 2006

Viewing the Past but Looking to the Future by Eugen Florin Wagner Eugenio Wagner' summed up his experiences of the trip to Auschwitz after half a year:

When I was thirteen and asked my father about the Shoah, he answered me with sensitivity, but this topic remained threatening for me, in a way I couldn't express in words. The sense of threat derived from the excess of destruction, violence and death. The official days of remembrance depicted in the media, like the liberation of Auschwitz commemorated on [anuary 27th throughout Europe, the liberation from Fascism and National Socialism on Aprii 25th celebrated in Italy, and the "Night of the Pogrom in the Third Reich" (also called "The Night of Broken Glass") on November 9th in Germany actually increased my fear and didn't help me at ali to handle the overwhelming images and information about the death camps and the shocking events of the Second World War. I therefore sought further discussion with my father, who tried to help me understand that history, especially regarding the Shoah, consists not only of abstract figures and terms but also of personal human persecution, death and pain. He told me about his first trip to Auschwitz in 1995. It was during my time in middle school in 1999 that I undertook reading the report from Auschwitz entitled Survival in Auschwitz-the Nazi Assault on Humanity, written by the famous Italian [ewish writer Primo Levi. While reading the book, I learned from my parents of Levi's fate. During the discussion, my father told me openly about the dose contact of the Wagner family with Hitler, and said: "Unfortunately, the German part of our Wagner fa m ily, especially your great-grandmother Winifred, your great-uncle Wieland and your grandfather Wolfgang, left us with the burden of their adrniration and active support of Hitler. For that reason you and I have a special responsibility to learn from family and German and European history. Don't remain silent when you can prevent injustice." I began to understand the dark sides of German history and my farnily's his story, and the reasons for my father's commitments and his work with Abraham Peck in the Post-Shoah Dialogue Group, always in conjunction with Polish, Jewish, and the painful Peck family history. My realizations became a personal life experience when father, my cousin Alberto, and I traveled with Abraham to Landsberg, Nuremberg, Bayreuth,

Wroclaw, Leczyca, Lodz, Zwolen, Cracow, Auschwitz, Dresden, and Buchenwald in August 2005. I was confronted on all sides with German, Polish, Jewish, and family history, interpreted by Abraham and my father in explicit discussions with Alberto and me as we travelled to the above-named cities. This trip was a turning point in my life regarding my own moral position, and even made it possible for me to express my fear, as a first step toward overcoming it, living my life more consciously with joy, and being aware that Auschwitz reflects the suffering of human beings of every sort of European and family background. For me, learning from history means making room for empathy in daily life.

See chapter 16: „Unwanted Legacies“ by Gottfried Wagner and Abraham Peck

Outlook: Auschwitz as beginning, accepting diversity, reflections from 2006 by Alberto Galli based on personal experience during our trip to Germany and Poland in August 2005

I have read recently *The Night* of Elie Wiesel. I try to imagine the suffering people felt when they were deported to concentration camps or extermination camp. In such a situation, survival becomes the ultimate purpose of existence. I never imagined that suffering, if taken to extremes, could erase any sense of compassion and ethics. People are forced to behave like animals. They are loaded onto cattle cars and struggle for a piece of bread; they even go so far as to kill each other. In this struggle against death, even the most affluent relative becomes a "mortal burden": those who try to help the weaker suffer the same dramatic fate in the end. " Even Elie Wiesel, who realizes that it is useless to help his father by offering him his own ration of bread, testifies to this: "So you only kill yourself. On the contrary, you should receive his ration, "the block warden advises. When I think about what happened in the past, I feel a deep discomfort, realizing that we are not out of danger that these events will recur. "Nowadays, the core problem that is the cause of all these events remains: the inability to accept and tolerate the diversity of others, both in their positive and negative forms. This is evidenced not only by the current events of intolerance against Israel by countries in the Middle East, such as Palestine and Iran, but also by the clashes between Christians and Muslims in Sudan and the terrible conflict between the rival tribes of Tuzi and Utu in Rwanda. Only when the majorities learn to be different will we be sure that such atrocities will not happen again. Personally, I have never understood why diversity is necessarily something hostile to fight. In it, I was again strengthened on my journey with Abraham, Uncle Gottfried and Eugenio.

1) *Unsere Stunde Null, Deutsche und Juden nach 1945, Familiengeschichte, Holocaust und Neubeginn*, Historische Memoiren, Böhlau Verlag Wien Köln Weimar, 2006, S. 382