

AUSCHWITZ: revisited

"Lest we forget the human dust in the tears of God.."

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AUSCHWITZ was written in the greenhouses on the University of Toronto's President's estate in less than one hour in September of 1983 over a two day period, following a conversation with a poet/friend Abbe Eddleson, in a downtown Toronto restaurant. Some of the poems were presented during a poetry reading held at the Main Street Library in October of 1983 and subsequently published by Chris Faiers of Unfinished Monument Press in November 1983 with a print run of 300 copies (with photographs).

A (double) review of the 8 page Chapbook appeared in the Canadian Book Review Annual 1984:

"It is hard to believe that Auschwitz and Suburban Eyes were written by the same person.

Auschwitz consists of seven poems. The title is a metaphor for the atrocities committed during World War II, not only to the Jewish race but to other peoples as well. The tone is ironic, angry, bitter, and scornful. The most powerful poems are those which describe the horrors of the concentration camps. In "The Ovens" we read "I was there when / they cleaned out the ovens, / gut wrenching sweet stench / with every shower of flames and / I saw what intense heat does / to fragile skin and bones,..." It is not clear who is actually speaking here; a German concentration camp official? Ray is bitter, but he does not believe that those involved in the war should inflict their bitterness and hate onto the younger generation ("Your Fathers Pain"), and feels that the Jews should not forget that they were not the only ones throughout history to be massacred ("Eleven Million Human Beings"). Incidentally, the latter poem is rhymed, demonstrating that Ray can handle rhyme quite effectively. Auschwitz is a powerful statement, partly because the theme can never fail to evoke some response." N.M. Drutz CBRA

The poem "Prisoner Of War" was awarded the Editor's Prize by Sheila Martindale, for *"the best poet published in 1989"* by the Canadian Authors Association and was published in their magazine: *Canadian Author*.

The poem Vietnam War Memorial appeared in *Crossing Lines: Poets who came to Canada in the Vietnam Era*, Seraphim Editions 2008.

The poems George and Letter Home From A Body Bag appeared in *Going Down Goose Lane Toward Broken Jaw*, Harmonia Press 2005.

On The Discovery of Joseph Mengele has been published several times in journals and magazines over the years.

(In)Sanity was produced as a song in the album *From The Outside* by Curtis Brunet in 2001

The poems in the Chapbook were actually written on a duality theme. While the general theme of the poetry is WWII, each poem also represents other wars and conflicts that have taken place since WWII and the individuals dealing with post war trauma. Several additional poems have been added to this collection which deal with the themes expressed in *Auschwitz*.

"Lest we forget the human dust in the tears of God.."

AUSCHWITZ

My uncle went to Germany last year
to find those poets and politicians
who had shaped his childhood, but he
could not find that lunatic fringe you see,
for they smoked their last cigarette in 1943.

THE OVENS

I was there when
they cleaned out the ovens,
gut wrenching sweet stench
with every shower of flames and
I saw what intense heat does
to fragile skin and bones,
every shape, size, color and race,
voice, habit and curve of face
went not screaming into that place.
Behind those iron oven doors,
soot black sealed door
with pyrex viewing windows
not screaming they went but
drugged or gassed or frozen.
Any screams were long ago and far away.
I'll never forget the frozen pregos
popping open like so many apple pies
when stuck with a fork.
They don't last long in the intense
unbearable heat, joining billowing
blackened smoke going up,
farther up that phallic stack
airing transgressions in the name
of medical science.
I thank their Gods and my God
that they had reclined in the arms of Morpheus
long before they were scraped from
the cinder pit for I was there when
they cleaned out the ovens.

PRISONER OF WAR

We were unable to help you
flesh torn barbed wire
scraping red your bare skin
like a lover's fingernails digging in
drawing you closer to her.
I, we, saw you running, muscles pumping.
Your heart filled our eyes with tears
both for your last burst to freedom and for fear.
Fear of dog tracks in your footsteps
as they clamped your throat and drank
your breath into their hot lungs.
Ripped bone white you hung
in your new found freedom
and as the guards pulled you
from your steel sanctuary,
two blood stained barbs caught your cheeks
and pulled a smile across your face.

PRISONER OF WAR PART TWO

All the things that I do to survive
and all the words of hope that I hear
are in desperation. The bridge
of my life is on the horizon
and I can see the broken railings now.
Only a fool sees past them
to the other side and I am pacing
my own footsteps to the edge,
pick up my wings and fly away.

YOUR FATHERS PAIN

How can you feel your father's pain?
Why do you carry his hate
upon your shoulders?
Second and third generation hate.
You make it sound like your ancestors
were the only people killed in the war.
Let him fight his own fight,
dream his own dreams and let him
hate his own hates.
You can only help him by letting go,
instead you reinforce his ideas
and his ideals on people
who weren't even born then!
Do you want to be married to his memories?
It may hurt to divorce your feelings
from his fears before marrying into
this modern world and as everyone knows,
you can't dance at two weddings
at the same time and then
be expected to spend the honeymoon
in only one pair of arms.

ELEVEN MILLION HUMAN BEINGS

When you opened the restaurant door
and entered the almost empty room,
I could feel the winds of war,
a death draft, doom.
Your life has been the pits,
leading us all to believe it was
only the Jews who died at Auschwitz.
Do your history books not include:
those passing into senility or
those of mental tranquillity or
ordinary Poles or Negroes or Commies too,
Ukrainians or Slavs or political dissidents or
non Aryan aliens and gays or
does your book only list Jews?
Six million went up in smoke!
You think the other five million were a joke?
It was my father's army that liberated Auschwitz
but do I flaunt his medals
upon my chest in front of you?
Don't dump your holocaust on my plate,
there really is no one left alive
for you to hate.

(IN)SANITY

there is a fierce underlying
force in all of us that
is sitting on that fine line
drawn on the wall
in Freud's outer office,
a line so fine as it crosses the ceiling
and passes down the center of
the French doors to his inner world,
that one of these doors at a time
need only be opened by the gentle
shifting of weight no matter how fast
and furious we want to get in
after the door has been opened

ON THE DISCOVERY OF JOSEF MENGELE ad2000

Good God!
They're not dead yet?
The geriatric Jews hunting
those crusty old Nazis
who are too old to strike the match
that started all this
hatred in the first place!

They must all be well
over one hundred years old,
but don't believe everything
you hear as their
one hundred years of solitude,
of hiding, of tracking, of killing
will never end for
their children will follow
their children and so on and so on and ...
soon, no one will be alive
to stand up for the Afghans
and the Cambodians and the
South Americans and the South Africans
and on and on and on ...

because no one cares
for the Third World nigger
and the back woods,
slant eyed gooks or the
child born and raised on the streets
of Calcutta, the City of Joy.

VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL

Tonight I found something
I thought I had lost;
along the Black Wall
my fingers felt the souls of time,
passed over strangers, old friends,
fifteen years of unnecessary bloodshed,
checked through forty or fifty names
in the Book of The Black Wall,
holding back the tears, lest
I should find one name I knew
having known them before adolescence.
I could not visualize them maimed
or missing in action or dead.
I could not see them clothed in khaki,
gun in hand, forgetting
the one thing they and I had lost,
our childhood.

D-DAY 1944

Time and footsteps pass us by
and in the silent darkness cry.
Remember us, you who pass here by,
where we now lie.

Say a soft serene prayer.
Remember us always
until you, like us are there.

found in my father's WWII diaries

1989
for the Colonel

1989
was not a good year for war vets.
Few made it past Christmas,
some slipped through the New Year.
All of them slipped through our memories.

1989
was not a good year to die,
because:
you can't say I love you
when you're gone,
you can't share the good times
when you're gone,
you can't clean your gun
when you're gone,
you can't play with your grandchildren
when you're gone,
you can't change your will
when you're gone,
you can't smile
when you're gone,
you can't tell war stories
when you're gone,
you can't hug me
when you're gone,
you can't say I Love You
you just.....can't..

GEORGE!

What is it you saw or didn't see
when you walked into that country,
blinded by glory
the ins and outs
lights and oil
sand and stone
burkha and bazooka,
muscles on those uniformed boys?

What is it you saw or didn't see
before dropping terror on that innocent country,
sitting in a tavern on that Friday night,
if you can remember the tavern
or the night for that matter,
planning every one else's life.
It was the night before giving the orders:
GO TO WAR! KEEP THE PEACE!

You thought you were protecting
the world from terrorists,
forcing your democracy on
Allah Akbar,
inflaming the Arab fatwah
captured on Al Gazirah.

George!!
Believe me when I say
you won't be remembered for your vision
as Commander in Chief
of the US Military and Coalition of the Willing.

You think you are every man
and all men, except the French
whom you now despise,
so I guess you will never come
across Voltaire who wrote about you
200 years ago when He said:

Everyman is guilty of the good
he did not do

[Edmonton May 2004]

LETTER HOME FROM A BODY BAG

This is my last letter home,
just enough time to say goodbye
to dad and mom, all my friends,
roses in the hedge,
the street corner poet selling words,
the street corner church selling words,
the street walker selling words.

This is to be my last letter home,
to Tom, Dick, Sally, Fred, Spot and Sue.
If I could only be there to see the looks
on their faces but I m going to war
and they wouldn't recognize me
or my street corner face.
My camouflaged face.

This should be my last letter home,
where in my old bedroom sat my trunk
filled with old letters, old dreams,
uniform and ammo case, journals.
No one will read them because I never
sparked a magic fire in their hearts
strong enough to melt the stones and ice
in their illiterate minds

Is this my last letter home,
where, when I was there,
the light was on,
the day I ran away to join the war.
Reach out and read me.
Read my books, plays, poetry,
never more those false smiles when I call.

This is to be my last letter home,
one copy to you, one to her and
one to each friend who greeted me first,
smiled, saved a live, shared my feelings for peace.
Anyone who is better now
than when they started,
one to the clubs I belong to
and the ones I wanted to,
and maybe one to some of your friends.

This should be my last letter home,
to ask for love, world of freedom.
Can you say luck?
No, to you a soldier is a distant thing,
to me it's duty at all cost, people,
death, dogs, acid rain, diamonds in the rough.

Is this my last letter home?
You're damn right it is and you know it!
I've been hiding my feelings on paper,
writing between the lines of all my
poems, stories, plays, trying to reach only you.
Wanting you to say, I understand...
I know I understand you... really I do.

YOU'LL COME TO MY GRAVE STONE
WHERE I WILL FOREVER BE ALONE
HOLDING THIS LETTER
BROUGHT FROM HOME
STILL THINKING IT'S ONLY
ANOTHER POEM