A life-changing spring break

By LESLIE LOPEZ
Entertainment Editor

"Never say it's the end of the road," is the resounding chant I brought back with me this spring break. Alongside eleven other students, we spent 10 days traveling from Germany to Poland retracing the steps of the perpetrators, victims and bystanders of World War II with the Expanding Your Horizons group.

This trip allowed us to learn beyond a textbook by making real-world connections to the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and our responsibility to create a better world through action.

Traveling to Berlin, Warsaw and Krakow, centers of the Nazi regime, we learned of the losses of communities, but also of their revival in current day. The trip was a reflection of the past but also a charter for the future.

Visitors mend the broken past of the Jewish community by acknowledging both the atrocities of the Holocaust and the humanity of the people. I will never forget the monuments to Janusz Korczak who dedicated his life to helping children, little smugglers who risked their lives daily and the valiant fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto who fought for liberty. They are a symbol of our responsibility and power to create a better world with our own hands.

By far the most difficult but necessary portion of our trip was the concentration camp, Auschwitz.

Sarah Cappicillo, a junior stated, "Before we got to Auschwitz, I didn't really know how to emotionally prepare myself for what we were going to see. At first, I was a little surprised, I was almost in shock. It was as if my mind wasn't allowing me to fully process everything I was seeing, but then I entered the gas chamber. I looked up and realized I was standing underneath the vent where the Zyklon B would have been raining down. Then everything hit me all at once and I needed a moment by myself to really cry it out."

This event allowed us to identify with the people, seeing them as more than just victims. They represent the "dream of a better life with truth and justice, a life that is nor but will some day be..." As a visitor and now witness, I was made aware of my own responsibility to preserve the memory and to help create a just future.

It was truly a pleasure to have the experience to meet community members and witnesses the loss and reconstruction through hope.

The victims of World War II are a symbol of our responsibility and potential to create a better world with our own hands.

Left: The Okpowa Street Jewish cemetery, one of the largest remaining Jewish cemeteries in Europe. Right: The Anne Frank Zentrum in Berlin.

Photos by Leslie Lopez