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## *Remembering Auschwitz-Birkenau: "The Smallest Victims"*

Nichole Delasalas  
*Old Dominion University*

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Nichole Delasalas

## The Smallest Victims

This was my first experience overseas, so naturally I was nervous. It was overwhelming to think that we were going to Paris and Krakow where our major objective was to learn more about the Holocaust and those involved. In Paris there were not as many distinct reminders about what Holocaust victims went through, but in Krakow, it was all but obvious, especially at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I was not sure how to feel about Auschwitz. Was there a right and a wrong way to feel? I knew a place with such an awful and graphic history deserved the utmost respect for those who suffered and died there.

The emotions did not quite hit me until we pulled into the parking lot. We were about to walk in the footsteps of those that were imprisoned and/or died there, to hear the stories of so many people, and to just get a small glimpse of what their life was like. I do not believe anything can mentally prepare someone for Auschwitz. It is hard to put the emotions into words. You see the pictures online and learn the history in school, but nothing compares to the horror experienced by actually being there.

What I remember most are the exhibits that house the personal items of the victims. To look at them and know that behind each object is a story. Some items I could not look at. For example, the children's clothing and pictures. We heard the stories of the children involved in the Holocaust and those who could not be put to work were sent to the gas chambers. I think I was bothered the most by this because I have a three year old and could not imagine what they went through. Many of the children in France were separated from their parents by the Vichy authorities and deported to Auschwitz alone. It is hard to imagine the trauma of the separation of mother and child only to be followed by the gas chambers.

Auschwitz was one of the most life-changing experiences that I have ever had. I think about the Holocaust in a completely different way now. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and its transformation in me as one who will work to never allow another Auschwitz to happen again.