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Sites of Memory: My Personal Lens

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Sherry Dixon

My Personal Lens

I think that very early into this trip, the rest of my group realized that I like to take pictures. I took pictures of everything. I joked about running out of space on my computer because of so many pictures. Well, that actually happened! I came home after this ten day trip with 6000 pictures, which I am still sifting through. I feel as if I have been looking at pictures non-stop since I came home.

While in Paris our group visited with four Holocaust survivors, each of whom had a very touching and heart wrenching story of survival. What remains in my mind is survivor Ester Sénot's message that I have a responsibility to share the information I learned, both abroad and at home. I have a responsibility to make sure future generations know the truth about the Holocaust and know the details about what happened. Well, I have struggled with this mightily. I have yet to discuss the details of my trip with anyone. When I returned home, I found that I was unable to discuss the things I learned about or what I saw. Instead, I just say that I gained a new understanding of why it is so difficult for survivors to discuss their experiences in the Holocaust. There are no words to adequately describe how I felt there or what I remember. The feelings are too enormous to process; the words are too small to explain. Pictures, however, can tell it all without a single word.

Esther's words made a huge impact on me. It is indeed my responsibility to remind future generations of what happened in the past. Going through the thousands of pictures I have from this trip keep those memories fresh in my mind. At the beginning of the semester when we introduced ourselves to the group, I told them of my interest in photography. Dr. Finley then asked me to be the photographer for the group, which really intimidated me. Once I got there though, I had no trouble taking those pictures. I think even if she hadn't asked me to be the photographer I still would have come home with 6000 pictures. Pictures are the way I remember. Pictures are how I tell the stories. And yet, I was always respectful of the places we visited as I framed the shots that I took. I think I take pretty good pictures, and Dr. Finley-Croswhite has thanked me personally for some of what I was able to capture. While I have not spoken about my experiences very much, or how I felt about them, many people have looked at my pictures. You have looked at many of them on the Powerpoint tonight. Many people have seen what I remember. And so, in my own way, I am fulfilling my responsibility to share my experiences and the silent promise I made in Paris to Ester Sénot.