

Reading 10A

ARRIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ

“You have 15 minutes. Pack one suitcase and report in front of your house.”

You and your family join a procession marching to the railroad station. You are guarded by SS men and local police. The train arrives—cattle cars. You hold your father’s hand as you are forced into a car with 80 to 100 other people. The door slams and you hear the lock. About one-half hour later, the train begins to move.

After two hours, people grow thirsty; there is no room even to sit down; one small opening in a corner of the car is the sole source of air. There are no windows. It is almost impossible to see because of the darkness. You gasp for breath. There is no toilet, only a bucket somewhere in the middle of the car. The heat grows unbearable. Your father’s hand has slipped from yours and you cannot see your family members. People begin to groan and scream, babies cry. The train stops—but nothing happens. Other trains pass by in a different direction.

The smell of sweat, excrement and urine permeates the car. People grow panicky, irritable, frantic. After eight hours, about 25 of the people have passed out or died. After 20 more hours, the train stops again. People cry out for water as they hear voices outside. A machine gun sprays the car and four people fall with blood flowing from their bodies. Your sister is one of them. Silence.

The doors open – air rushes in. “Raus! Raus! Out! Out!” There are dogs, men with guns, prisoners in striped uniforms take suitcases, old people and the dead out of the car. You watch as they throw your sister’s body onto a wagon. You move almost in a daze and get off the car onto the platform with crowds of others. Thousands of people have stumbled, fallen from the long line of cattle cars. The noises are deafening, frightening.

“Line up by fives! No talking!” Shots are heard. The air is filled with foul smelling smoke. A chimney is visible; flames and smoke billow from it. You are made to move in an endless line – shouts in German or other languages route people in different directions. Your father is again next to you. Someone whispers that you should lie about your age, “Tell them you’re 16.” A handsome SS man with a whip in hand and his coat draped over his shoulders asks your age. “Sixteen,” you lie. He points his whip to the left and you and your father follow his direction. You see your mother and old people and children going to the right. Unknown to you, you will never see them again. All those under 16 and over 40 are sent to die. Your mother, younger brothers and grandparents have disappeared.

There are lines, yelling, crying, dogs, orders, shots. Men and women have been separated from one another. You are made to strip and stand naked. Next, a bathhouse. You are sprayed with delousing solution—it burns. Still naked, you are marched to a long room where all body hair is shaved; your arm is tattooed with a number, and you are

given an ill-fitting uniform and shoes. Finally, you are herded into a barracks with about 200 others.

What has happened? Where are we, you wonder. What has happened to you mother and brothers? Your father is silent; he seems to be hypnotized, stiff, not responding to anything around him. Where did they take your poor sister's body? You ask someone with a striped uniform, another prisoner, when you will see your mother and brothers again. Where are they? He roughly drags you to a window and points: "Do you see that chimney? Do you see the smoke? There are you mother and brothers. This is not a summer camp—this is Auschwitz."