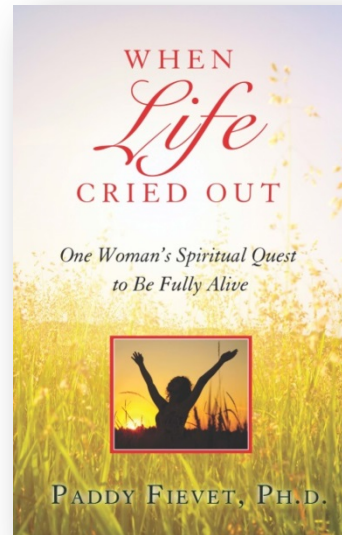


EXCERPT FROM

When Life Cried Out

By Paddy Fievet, Ph.D.

(1500 words)



Deep in thought, Peter and I left the Belgium Exhibit moving quietly along the row of remaining exhibits without wanting to enter another one. Each of us had seen enough in this area. Placing one foot in front of the other, I managed to keep walking down the alleyway between the compounds hoping that if I kept looking at my feet I would not have the ability to see how many other buildings that were around us. We passed several groups of tourists as deadly silent as we were. Auschwitz was one of the most quiet tourist attractions I have ever experienced, quite beyond words. Horror has no voice other than an inward piercing scream reverberating in one's soul. I had not realized Peter altered our course from the exit area to a pathway on the outside of the Auschwitz compounds. Before long, we were standing beside the only crematorium at Auschwitz.

Honestly, I don't remember the construction materials of the walls or the exterior of the building, but I do remember the roof being very low to the ground as if the earth had been piled upon the sides to keep gasses from seeping outward. The red brick chimney reached beyond the roofline; it looked tall and ominous to me, as if by sheer height alone it made a statement to all who could see it nearby or from a distance.

"Are you going in?" Peter asked. By the time Peter finished his question, I was already entering the building.

Like a zombie on an unknown mission, no thoughts as to whether I should enter the building or just pass by ever came to fruition. Instead, I felt like a sleepwalker programmed into doing something far beyond consciousness. My thinking switched dimensions; thought and vision flew at me intuitively from somewhere—some dimension—other than my own experience without conscious awareness. It brought with it sheer horror beyond any recognizable description.

Large, sturdy bricks formed the oven that remained inside. The interior chamber had been

constructed of solid cement. The walls, floor, and interior roof looked completely unyielding; I didn't know how something could be built that impenetrable. Even the hypogeum carved out of solid rock far underground in Crete wasn't this dense. Anything trapped inside this chamber had no chance of survival.

As I entered the gas chamber, I wondered why in the name of all that's holy it still remained. From what I had read, most all of the crematoriums had been destroyed quickly after the war. Yet, this one still existed. Later, I learned that it had been reconstructed for the tourists.

The cement felt solid under my feet, as if it literally could not be destroyed. I knew it not to be true, yet the feeling permeated my being that the cement structure felt like a sarcophagus. As I entered the second interior door, I intuited a whispered thought from ancient times before I was born.

This is not a shower.

On I walked in my zombie trance as if some force beyond my own consciousness pulled me deeper into the chamber of death—alone, but not alone. It did not matter to me if Peter followed me inside or not. In fact, I don't remember one way or the other if he came into the inner chamber, the one where tablets were dropped creating the gas that killed those who were not ready to die.

Plop, fizz.

Sensations of others, of myself at another time, grasped at me intuitively inside the chamber, silent thoughts wanting to be discovered, wanting to be purged. I huddled near a column at the wall not wanting to move while simultaneously wanting to run, to go home, and to escape.

Hold your breath. Do not breathe this.

I leaned against the wall holding my breath just like the people I had intuited who really were not ready to die decades ago. Finally, I gasped for air knowing it was over. Looking around me, the people of my vision—the people who were starving, who were without clothes or in rags, the people who were as afraid of dying as I was—were not there. Yet, I felt them, I heard them, and I witnessed them. I felt part of them, one with them. I had loved them in my childhood dreams.

And I cried with them.

None of this made any sense to me whatsoever. So into the intuitive moment, I had been unaware of the other five or so people inside the crematorium who evidently were as naïve as I was for going inside in the first place. I knew I was not alone, but I felt alone, felt as if my entire body had disappeared, felt as if no one could ever approach me again. I tried to feel

the solid cement underneath my feet in order to energetically anchor myself, but I had to look down to make sure it existed. Devastated, I felt unreal, quite absent, and absolutely abandoned.

As if in a trance, I left the building, pausing shortly before the open red brick oven. The cement that previously felt so solid underneath my feet felt far below me as if I were a spirit floating through the room. I looked at the emptiness in front of the oven like a useless piece of trash tactlessly discarded. Somehow, I intuitively pierced a veil between time past and time present. I felt like I was in spirit form watching my own body being shoved mercilessly into the oven.

But how could this be?

Placing each foot in front of the other carefully in order to not fall into total despair, I walked out of that death chamber into the light of my own day. Looking up, I wanted to scream at the magnificent blue sky, begging it to overshadow what I had just felt. Who was that woman who tried not to breathe in order to save her life? How had I attached to her spirit as she hovered over her own dead body watching it being shoved deliberately without compassion into a furnace?

Was her spirit me?

More than any other time in my life, I needed a hug from someone, just an agape-type hug in order to feel love, to feel compassion—for that matter just to be able to feel. I needed to be touched, to feel my own body's warmth and make sure I was still alive and real. I looked imploringly over to Peter wanting physical contact—to be held, to be soothed. Peter, however, was not inclined whatsoever. Perhaps he had fallen into his own well. The words of Jesus rang into my soul: "...lo I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20). That would have to be enough.

Standing there in the open air just outside the crematorium, I breathed in deeply. I gazed up to the sky, then to the green treetops nearby. Looking at the several others who were exiting the crematorium, I wondered how they were affected. Just as silent as the other tourists in Auschwitz, they made no noise, not even to each other. Even the tourists in Auschwitz seemed to be divided and conquered in ways beyond common understanding. Communities still do not survive in Auschwitz. Quietly, they walked away. Peter had moved to the pathway nearby ready to leave. Evidently he had seen enough. I turned my glance from him back to the crematorium and then further down the alleyway where the museums had been made out of prisoner barracks. I joined Peter at the path in order to exit Auschwitz.

"If you think that was horrid, you should go to Birkenau," the man standing just next to us declared. Honestly, I have no idea where he came from. His words startled both of us

because of the suddenness of his appearance. Frankly, I was not even aware if he had come from inside the chamber or if he had just stopped to speak when walking toward the gate.

“What is Birkenau?” I asked, having never heard the word before. “Why did you say that?”

“Auschwitz II is also called Birkenau. It’s another concentration camp just nearby. You really should go there. You really should.” With that he turned to walk away nonchalantly.

Peter and I looked at each other for a pregnant moment. Our visit to Auschwitz had only taken about four hours. Since it was early afternoon, we still had plenty of time for another experience. Of course we would go to Birkenau, if for no other reason other than the odd way in which the choice was presented to us by a perfect stranger. From a map of the area, we learned the distance to reach Birkenau required only a short drive.

Even though in my naivety I had not heard of Birkenau, Peter did know of it from his study of World War II. As we navigated the couple of miles from one horror story to another much worse, Peter explained to me that Birkenau existed for the sole purpose of bringing captives from different places in Europe in order to determine the fate of each prisoner. While Auschwitz had been designated as a work camp, Birkenau existed as an extermination camp.

I lost myself at Birkenau.

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