

down. He falls on his back, striking his head hard. Naked flesh presses on his face and all over him, stilling his contortions. He cannot move. He does not die of the gas. Very little enters his system. He goes almost at once, the life smothered out of him by the weight of dying Jews. Call it a blessing, for death by the gas can take a long time. The Germans allow a half hour for the process.

When the men in stripes pull apart the tangled dead mass, the sea of stiff human nakedness, and uncover him, his face is less contorted than others, though nobody notices one old thin dead body among thousands. Jastrow is dragged by a rubber-gloved Sonderkommando to a table in a mortuary where his gold-filled teeth are ripped out with pliers and dropped into a pail. This process goes on wholesale all over the mortuary, with the search of orifices and the cutting off of the women's hair. He is then loaded on a hoist which is lifting bodies in assembly-line fashion to a hot room where a crowd of Sonderkommandos is busily at work at a row of furnaces. His body on an iron cradle, with two children's bodies piled on top of him because he is so small, goes into an oven. The iron door with a glass peephole slams shut. The bodies rapidly swell and burst, and the flames burn the fragments like coal. Not until the next day are his ashes carted to the Vistula in a big truck loaded with human ash and bone fragments, and dumped into the river.

3. From Night, by Elie Wiesel (New York: Avon Books, 1969), pp. 74-76:

I witnessed other hangings (in Auschwitz). I never saw a single one of the victims weep. For a long time those dried-up bodies had forgotten the bitter taste of tears.

Except once. The Oberkapo of the fifty-second cable unit was a Dutchman, a giant, well over six feet. Seven hundred prisoners worked under his orders, and they all loved him like a brother. No one had ever received a blow at his hands, nor an insult from his lips.

He had a young boy under him, a pipel, as they were called—a child with a refined and beautiful face, unheard of in this camp.

(At Buna, the pipel were loathed; they were often crueller than adults. I once saw one of thirteen beating his father because the latter had not made his bed properly. The old man was crying softly while the boy shouted: "If you don't stop crying at once I shan't bring you any more bread. Do you understand?" But the Dutchman's little servant was loved by all. He had the face of a sad angel.)

One day, the electric power station at Buna was blown up. The Gestapo, summoned to the spot, suspected sabotage. They found a trail.