

# Remembering the Unimaginable

By Mike Trippitt

**75 years ago on 27th January 1945 the Soviet Red Army liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi concentration and extermination camp in occupied Poland.**

230 Soviet soldiers died in the fighting, and approximately 700 corpses of those who had been murdered by the SS in the final days, or who had succumbed to exhaustion were discovered. 7000 prisoners were saved.

But 1,100,000 prisoners, of which 960,000 were Jewish, had been killed there. Auschwitz-Birkenau remains the largest site of mass murder in human history.

Among those shocking numbers, it is the smallest, 75, that needs our careful attention.

The horrors of the Nazi's policy of the extermination of Jews, a chapter in history so awful it is difficult to comprehend, did not happen in the dark ages. It did not happen among savages, or before intelligent life. It did not happen before the world knew right from wrong, and good from evil.

It was happening just 75 years ago in a world of aeroplanes, of motorcars, of telecommunications, and it happened to people among us. It happened, in fact, in a world much like ours.

Recently I met a couple who had returned from a year-long tour of Europe that included a visit to Auschwitz. "It's like it has just happened. Even now," said one. "It's not a place you want to go. It's a place you need to experience, and understand."

The couple told me of their anxiety when they arrived, of their tears, and how they found it hard to accept that human beings could have done what took place there: "It made it so real. You could feel it in everybody there."

Mike Trippitt is a freelance writer living in St Ives. His blog is at [www.miketrippitt.com](http://www.miketrippitt.com) and you can follow him on Facebook.

Their powerful testimony led me to re-write my bucket list. Sure, The Orient Express is still there, as is a visit to Rio, and learning to play the guitar. But there's a new entry: a trip to Auschwitz, and here's why.

On 19th December 2018 I stood inside the Old Penlee Lifeboat Station at Mousehole, Cornwall, from where the RNLI lifeboat Solomon Browne launched exactly 37 years earlier. The lifeboat was lost, along with the lives of all eight crew aboard and the eight aboard Union Star who they had gone to save. It was one of the worst RNLI disasters in its history.

When I stood, welling up, on the spot from where Solomon Browne took eight men of Mousehole to their graves, I could not right that wrong. I could not bring them back to safe waters. But I could write and talk about my experience and tell the Penlee story.

So it is with Auschwitz. We cannot right the evil that still echoes there. We cannot bring back those that lost their lives. But we can visit, and we can experience the horrors that remain. We can tell our friends, our children and our grandchildren. We can encourage others to go and to tell their story.

Within the blinking of an eye, the holocaust will pass from living memory. But we have an obligation to keep the memory alive in whatever way we can. In a world of increasing extremism, we must ensure that an Auschwitz-Birkenau will never happen again.