

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Veteran poet Thomas Carper of Cornish is an emeritus professor of English at the University of Southern Maine. His remarkable sonnets combine a scrupulous attention to form with the urgency of life experience. In this example he writes about a Nazi extermination camp in occupied Poland during World War II.

Nobody at Treblinka

by Thomas Carper

Sie waren nicht ein kleiner Mann.

—Film director Claude Lanzmann
to a former Nazi official

But keep the scale in mind. What single man
Could undertake that kind of enterprise
When each day trains from half of Europe ran
Into the camp? The prisoners swarmed like flies
Onto the platforms. Hundreds did their jobs
Of keeping books, processing and selecting,
Or guarding work brigades, or moving mobs
Into the chambers...cleaning...disinfecting.
You see, with those large numbers, no one said,
“X is responsible.” We were a team
Handling the hordes—the living, and the dead.
Mine was a minor function. Do I seem
Like someone who would cause such sufferings?
I was a nobody. Nobody does those things.

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