

December 21, 2010

Dear Friends,

May the Miracle of Christmas be with you and your family and fill you with Peace and Joy. We send you warmest greetings from a snowy Oswiecim.

Christmas 1944 Monowitz: It was snowing and very cold.

*It was a memorable Christmas for the world at war; memorable for me too, because it was marked by a miracle. At Auschwitz, the various categories of prisoners (political, common criminals, social misfits, homosexuals, etc) were allowed to receive gift packages from home, but not the Jews. Anyway, from whom could the Jews receive them? From their families, exterminated or confined in the surviving ghettos? From the very few who had escaped the roundups, hidden in cellars, in attics, terrified and penniless? And who knew our address? For all the world knew, we were dead. And yet a package did finally find its way to me, through a chain of friends, sent by my sister and my mother, who were hidden in Italy. The package contained ersatz chocolate, cookies, and powdered milk, but to describe its real value, the impact it had on me and on my friend Alberto, is beyond the powers of ordinary language. In the Camp, the terms eating, food, hunger, had meanings totally different from their usual ones. That unexpected, improbable, impossible package was like a meteorite, a heavenly object, charged with symbols, immensely precious, and with an enormous momentum. We were no longer alone: a link with the outside world had been established, and there were delicious things to eat for days and days (Primo Levi, Moments of Reprieve, pp 62-65, Penguin 1995).*

Staff of the Education Department

