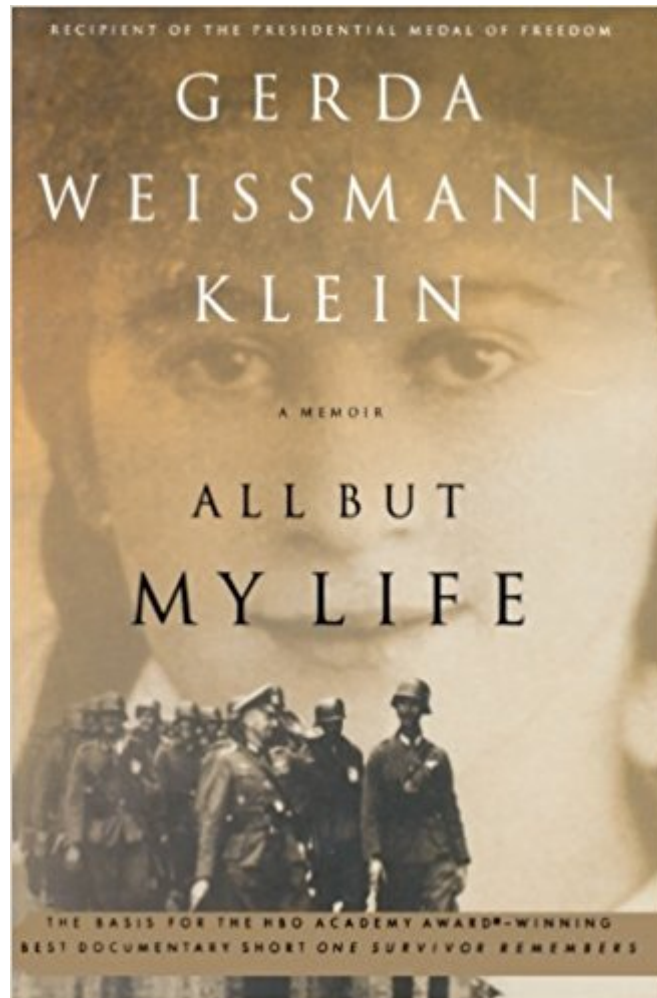




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All But My Life: A Memoir



Synopsis

All But My Life is the unforgettable story of Gerda Weissmann Klein's six-year ordeal as a victim of Nazi cruelty. From her comfortable home in Bielitz (present-day Bielsko) in Poland to her miraculous survival and her liberation by American troops--including the man who was to become her husband--in Volary, Czechoslovakia, in 1945, Gerda takes the reader on a terrifying journey. Gerda's serene and idyllic childhood is shattered when Nazis march into Poland on September 3, 1939. Although the Weissmanns were permitted to live for a while in the basement of their home, they were eventually separated and sent to German labor camps. Over the next few years Gerda experienced the slow, inexorable stripping away of "all but her life." By the end of the war she had lost her parents, brother, home, possessions, and community; even the dear friends she made in the labor camps, with whom she had shared so many hardships, were dead. Despite her horrifying experiences, Klein conveys great strength of spirit and faith in humanity. In the darkness of the camps, Gerda and her young friends manage to create a community of friendship and love. Although stripped of the essence of life, they were able to survive the barbarity of their captors. Gerda's beautifully written story gives an invaluable message to everyone. It introduces them to last century's terrible history of devastation and prejudice, yet offers them hope that the effects of hatred can be overcome.

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Customer Reviews

“Soul searching and human . . . A moving personal testament to courage.”

Herbert Mitgang, The New York Times “An unforgettable reading experience . . .

All But My Life is one of the most beautifully written human documents I have ever read. In this respect it is as sensitive and 'disturbing' a story as is The Diary of Anne Frank. — Library Journal — "Gerda Weissmann Klein moves you, and not just because the story she can tell is so horrific. It is the passion with which she looked through the horror and found a heart-felt and basic goodness in humanity . . . All But My Life is filled with wonderful acts of decency and normalcy, even as she describes three years in labor camps and three months of a forced winter march from Germany to Czechoslovakia. — • — Royal Ford, The Boston Globe

Gerda Weissmann Klein was born in Bielsko, Poland, in 1924, and now lives in Arizona with her husband, Kurt Klein, who as a U.S. Army lieutenant liberated Weissmann on May 7, 1945. The author of five books, she has received many awards and honorary degrees and has lectured throughout the country for the past forty-five years. Kurt and Gerda are the authors of The Hours After: Letters of Love and Longing in War's Aftermath, published by St. Martin's Press. One Survivor Remembers (a production of Home Box Office and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), winner of an Emmy Award and the Academy Award for documentary short subject, was based on All But My Life.

My late uncle Moshe (originally called Kurt) Klein was a first cousin of Gerda Klein's husband, Kurt Klein. And so I have personal interest in this book. Nevertheless, it is truly an amazing account by a Holocaust survivor, and an insight into what so many millions of others went through and never lived to tell about their horrific experiences. There is nothing more to say, except: read it yourself to see what just one person's experience was. And then multiply that by around 6 million and you may just get an inkling as to what took place, but never will you or I be able to really reach a full understanding of the madness that was perpetrated by other human beings against others.

Out of all the books I have read recently about the holocaust this was the best. Part One: You fall in love with Gerda, her family, friends and home town of Bielitz. Part Two: You start the trip to hell. This part broke a little piece of my heart away and the tears ran down my cheeks. Part Three: Starting to heal and a new life. Gerda had a strong will to live and still just barely made it though the starvation and Death Walk. Her family were with her on the whole journey in mind and soul.

I was afraid to start this book that a friend had recommended, but I am glad I did. It is a well-written

account of what one woman endured under the Nazi occupation of Poland. Understated and without horrifying details, I was able to read and empathize with her. At times it was almost lyrical. Without a doubt I have a greater admiration for what the Jews endured and managed to survive during WWII.

I have read many books about the Nazis and the Holocaust. This book was recommended by an old school friend with whom I was recently reunited. As kids we never talked about things like the war, but 50 years later we realized that our families came from the same Austro-Hungarian area. She recommended this wonderful book - a true story of a young girl who spent all of WWII in concentration camps. The prose is rich and bold, truthful and endearing. I highly recommend it!

I have read 50 to 60 books on the holocaust and this book ranks in the top 5. I simply couldn't put it down. Gerda is able to explain her feeling in a very descriptive way. This allows for the reader to get into the mind of a teenage girl. She displays such a love for her family that all teens should take into account. Love and family are not things money can buy. They are the most precious things in life. Her love for her brother as well as her family is a lesson all of us should learn from. She gives a realistic view of what the holocaust was like. She does refrain from telling us much of the incredible cruelty that came from the Germans that she saw firsthand. Perhaps it's too shocking for her to relate. And can we ourselves relate to such horrors? Through the book we explore her mind as she sees things and tries to maintain a positive outlook through many ups and downs of a young girl. Still many things were not shared. Her thoughts on how young people her age growing up in a primarily Catholic country with modern values can become so cruel. Why did her family have so much faith in humanity that they allowed themselves to subject themselves to the Nazi orders to register and be deported. After all they had already known that many were being killed at the hands of the Nazis. Overall it was a well written book. Anyone interested in the holocaust should definitely read it. Gerda, you are amazing!

I have read and re read this book and it never lets me leave without deep thought. That sounds a bit grandiose, but please don't judge this incredibly well written book by the fool who read it. This woman lived through hell and her writing is astounding. It flows and is a day by day account of her experience, and I loved the hints about what the future held. She felt she owed her comrades who could no longer speak a voice, and she told their stories with respect and authenticity. For those who believe that the Holocaust happened, and for those who don't....I can't recommend this book highly enough.

I read it last year and I'm almost finishing read it again. It's a book I will keep for the rest of my life. If you like reading Anne Frank, there is no doubt you will enjoy this book. I don't usually re-read a book in this short amount of time so it shows how good it is. Before this book I read Gang Leader for a Day by Sudhir Venkatesh (also a good book) and I have to admit that All but My Life is what I enjoyed more. I wish it didn't have to end the way it did for many in the book. Gerda survived by always remembering how life was before the war and how it would be after. This is what kept her alive and gave her the courage and strength to continue on, despite the hardships she endured.

As Eli Weisel wrote Night, Day and Dawn, all of a very dark, sad and loathing nature, Gerda writes of sadness and ill treatment but with great feeling and hope for the future. Thank God she never promised herself to Abek or sadness may have taken her down a very different path. Her story is sad but glimmers of hope that the tragedy of the holocaust is never to be repeated. She never gives up her faith and shows us repeatedly her love for others less fortunate than herself.

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