

All but my life



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History 121 Book Analysis " All But My Life" February 15, 2013 All But My Life

All But My Life is a memoir about a young Jewish girl, Gerda Weissmann, who was able to endure the hardships of World War II and the Holocaust. Gerda went through and saw more horrific things in the matter of a few years than any of us will ever have to face in our lifetimes. The fact that a girl this young and hopeless can withstand so much pain but yet contain so much strength should be an inspiration to all. Reading this book really opened my eyes to what the world can bring.

After reading Gerda's journey, I will never again complain of times being tough or depressing in my life. This book really meant a lot to me for that very reason. It is amazing that no matter what Gerda had to face in those years she would constantly be looking forward. Regardless of the circumstances she pushed forward and longed for the time that it would all be over. As the book is coming to a close Gerda writes, " As I Finish the last chapter of my book, I feel at peace, at last. I have discharged a burden and paid a debt to many nameless heroes, resting in their unmarked graves. A burden is a heavy load and Gerda definitely had one to get off her shoulders. Up until this book Gerda was never able to tell anyone her full journey. She wasn't able to share the times spent with the friends she made during the hardships of the Holocaust. The debt she paid to many nameless heroes was that she was able to get the story out to people. Gerda was able to share first hand experiences to people that just may not understand the fight these young girls and other Jewish people put up during these years.

The book had to be written because Gerda knew that her journey needed to be told because of the small amount of survivors there were. She was one of

the lucky ones who were able to gather the strength to get through this horrific time in history. Thus, as much as she wanted to probably forget, the book had to be written. In my opinion All But My Life was written to and for anyone who wants to be moved by a strong and inspiring young girl. Also it was written for those who were unable to survive the Holocaust.

For those who will never be able to share their hard fought journey and are now just another number to total of lives lost during the Holocaust. Gerda's long and eventful journey didn't just take place in one location or even just one concentration camp for that matter. Her journey had several stops along the way and consisted of days and days of traveling in the harshest conditions. The journey of Gerda's story begins in September of 1939 in her hometown of Bielitz, Poland (4). Bielitz is where Gerda spent roughly the first sixteen years of her life (43).

In the early summer of 1942 Bielitz is Judenreined which means free of Jews basically. Gerda and her family are split and to travel in different directions. Gerda is headed toward Sosnowitz, Poland and gets there in June 1942 (96). From Sosnowitz, Gerda is sent to her first concentration camp in Bolkenhain, Germany (113). While at Bolkenhain, Gerda worked thread machines day in and day out; however, all in all the girls were treated pretty well at Bolkenhain compared to other concentration camps. Gerda would later find out that Bolkenhain was like heaven in comparison to what was to come.

Soon Gerda and the rest of the girls are sent to another concentration camp called Marzdorf in September of 1943 (145). Marzdorf was nothing like Bolkenhain and was purely miserable for Gerda. Luckily Gerda doesn't spend a great deal of time at Marzdorf and soon ends up in Landeshut during the

month of September of 1943, another concentration camp with ten other girls originally from Bolkenhain (152). After spending some time threading supplies for the German army in Landeshut, Gerda is transported to her final concentration camp in May of 1944, Grunberg (166).

After spending a significant amount of time in Grunberg the group is transported toward Germany. Gerda feels that the end of the war may be very near. As the march continues on the group ends up in helmbrechts barracks in the spring of 1945 (194). The group spends about a month in the barracks of Helmbrechts with less than half the amount of people left than they had started with. With just a couple hundred girls remaining the mere group left heads toward Czechoslovakia (201).

In May of 1945 Gerda and a handful of others arrive in Volary as the war slowly comes to an end (207). During her journey, Gerda is influenced by numerous people. Some she knew prior to leaving Bielitz and others she met along the way. All of which influenced every one of Gerda's actions. Gerda would lose all of these people except for one. Gerda's brother, Arthur, may have been the most influential person to her. He was there since her childhood and they acted as best friends. When Gerda was sixteen she saw her brother for the last time as he was called to leave Bielitz (21).

Gerda had enormous love for her family and her mother and father and also Niana were also very influential to her. Her father was her salvation. If not for what he had told her about suicide she may not ever have had the will power to go on with the cruel experiences of her journey. However, Gerda's parents do not survive the Holocaust and she sees them and Niana for the last time in the summer of 1942 (92). Prior to leaving Bielitz, Gerda has what I would

say is her first boyfriend. Abek is always caring for Gerda although she never really loves him.

He too would not survive the Holocaust. As a child, Gerda and Isle meet and they are bestfriends. They spend nearly the whole journey together until Isle passes away days before the war ends (205). During her travels from camp to camp Gerda also makes really good friends with Suse and Liesel. These were two girls were there to help each other through the hardships of the Holocaust. Suse died the day of liberation (213). While moving to further shelter Liesel also passed away (215). During Gerda's time at Bolkenhain she meets in my mind her avenging angel, Frau Kugler.

Although the Frau Kugler was thought to be sort of an enemy, she saves Gerda's life and they develop a sort of friendship. However, once deported to a new camp they never see each other again (137). Once the war ends Gerda meets Kurt Klein. Kurt is an American soldier that feels for Gerda for he too lost his parents due to the Holocaust. The two grow strong feelings for each other and Kurt is partially the reason for Gerda's fast and strong recovery. The two eventually move back to America and get married (246).

When Gerda and Kurt meet for the first time she is simply confused. She wonders why he cared so much about her. She couldn't figure it out. As time passed they met again and she loved seeing him. While apart she longed for the next time they would unite. I didn't expect the hand of fate in this story. I expected for Gerda to end up having feelings for Abek. However, Kurt was the one for her. While at the concentration camps Gerda encountered several guards. I was surprised by how many of the guards did what they could to help the victims as much as possible.

Their motivation must have been fear of what could have happened to them if they did not treat the Jews like animals. I can not think of any other reason someone could possibly think what was going on was ok. During Gerda's time in the Holocaust she is somehow able to gain strength to continue on while others are not able to. It was the words of her father that kept her from committing suicide even during the most gruesome times. The only thing that kept her positive was the thought that someday she might see her family again and be able to return to her home in Bielitz, Poland.

The title, All But My Life to me means something very simple. Gerda Weissmann Klein endured thousands of things as a teenager. She saw many horrific and breathtaking images. Met numerous friends along the way, but none of it was life to her. She went through everything but none of it was a normal life. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and it has truly touched me. My simple reaction is just amazement of how a girl can endure so much and still continue on with life with a positive outlook. This book will change the way I value life itself.