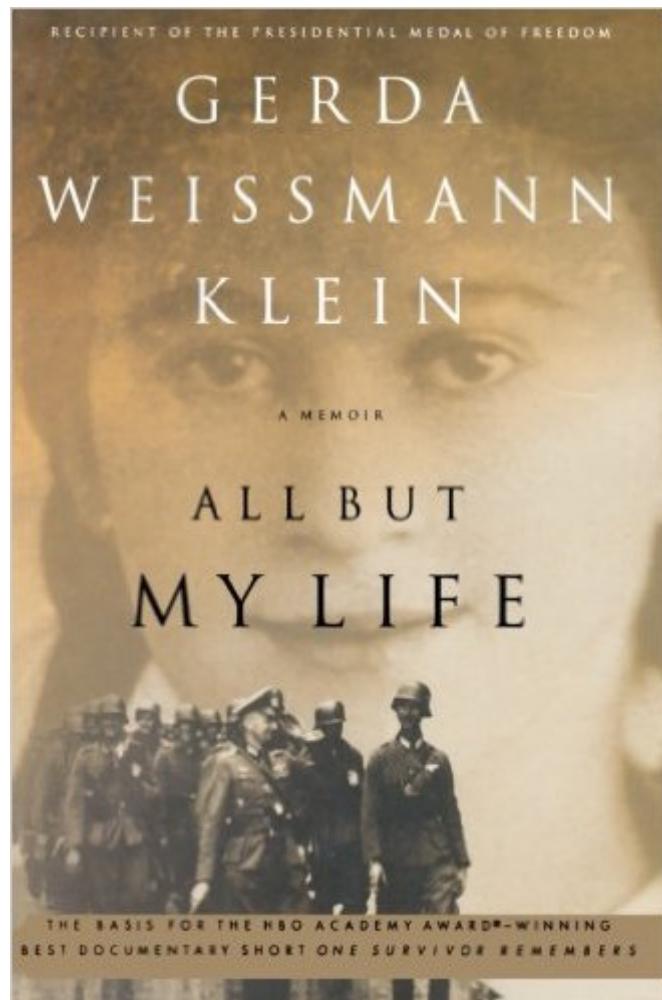


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# All But My Life: A Memoir



## **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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I purchased ALL BUT MT LIFE from Gerda when she came to Forest Hills NY to promote her book, the first edition. I felt honored to meet her; I will never forget her. I cried several times while reading

the book the first time and cried many times while reading the book, for the second time. It took my breath away in more ways than one. It is really a powerful piece of work. It's disturbing but intrinsically inspiring. I feel a special connection to Gerda, because she and I come from the same part of Poland. We were raised in a similar cultural environment. Our parents' homes were shrines of devotion to the family. The intense closeness of Gerda's family warmed my heart; it broke my heart while reading how the Germans ripped Gerda's family apart. I am a Holocaust survivor. In the last several years, I have told my life story at 650 different venues in the State of Oregon and Washington. ALL BUT MY LIFE is one of the books that I recommend to all my life audiences. It is a classic among Holocaust survivors' memoirs. It is brilliantly written. This inspirational book is sprinkled with faith and hope; it is gripping and fascinating. There are many lessons to be learned from this book. It is not just a chapter in history; it gives the reader of today a glance into the old country where respect for parents and their values had been adhered to. When the Germans ordered Gerda to report for deportation, her father told her to take along her boots. This was spring time and it did not sound logical to take boots with her. The deportees expected to be sent to forced labor camps for a short time. However Gerda did take the boots, because in those days a child just obeyed a father's requests. Adhering to the fifth Commandment "Honor your father and mother so that you may live longer" paid off, it probably saved Gerda's life. The infamous death march started with 2,000 young women and ended with only 120 survivors and Gerda was one of them. The boots apparently protected her toes from freezing. Respect for the parents, for the elderly, for society as a whole was prevalent in Gerda's old surroundings. Regrettably it is no longer the norm in the New World, today's world. Gerda's intense passion for her family was the impetus in her mind and body to endure. It is heartening to know that Gerda with her integrity, wit, intellect and luck rose from the ashes of the Holocaust to build a new family. She married Kurt Klein an American lieutenant who was one of her liberators. Out of bondage, Gerda immersed herself in her new life in Buffalo Ney York. She fell in love with the United States of America. Gerda has been living an active life to the fullest; a life full of love and purpose. Her untapped literary talents came to the fore; she flourished. Kurt passed away several years ago; Gerda, now at the age 86, lives in Arizona. She is still active in sharing her amazing and heart-wrenching life story with life audiences and readers of her books. Hitler deemed her to be inferior, but she has been proven herself to be superior. Her message implies that prejudice can only lead to an abyss. I have the highest esteem for Gerda. I am thrilled to know that President Barack Obama, on November 17, 2010, named Gerda Weissmann Klein among the fifteen recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian honor. While being incarcerated in Nazi camps, Gerda yearned to be reunited with her dear parents

and her beloved brother Arthur. She dreamt for a day to be able to eat as much bread as wanted, but she could not have dreamt to be honored by the president of the United States and its people. It is indeed exhilarating!

On the hot June day that Gerda Weissmann left her home for the last time, her father insisted that she wear her hiking boots. Gerda resisted, but an unspoken plea in her father's eye convinced her to strap them on. During a death march from January through April of 1945, those boots saved Gerda Weissmann's life. Many other women died of cold and starvation, but most fell for simple lack of footwear. Her camp sister, with whom she survived the worst horrors in several concentration and slave labor camps, died of exhaustion at a water pump minutes after American liberators freed the women from the march. Ms. Klein's tale about her boots, screened at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, led me to her book. I wanted to know every detail --- although, over the years, I have been privileged to hear many personal accounts from Holocaust survivors I know. Too many still cannot not speak about what they lived through. Millions never had the chance at all. By itself, the silence of the majority makes Ms. Klein's testimony priceless, like every other personal Holocaust chronicle. So does her reminder not to take anything for granted. So does her gem of a soul. --- Alyssa A. Lappen

These last words, Gerda Weissmann hears ring out over the crowd of Jews as they are herded away like cattle to an uncertain end. The person shouting them is her mother who is about to be ripped from her life. The Nazi's have taken everything she holds dear, family, home, friends and now she will fight for all that remains, her life and dignity. This book is a remarkable slice of time and life, written by a true survivor who lived through the times that tried men's souls. As she wades through the atrocities of a Nazi occupation, concentration camps, and a death march amidst freezing temperatures, to be liberated by her one true love, she is true to her mother's request. This is an amazing story that will stay a part of you forever. I am astonished at her strength of spirit and her continued belief in the future. A book doesn't get much better than this. Kelsana 6/19/01

Before reading this book I had visited Dachau, a labor camp in the south of Germany. I was shocked and appalled by what I heard went on in this camp, but until I read this book I never fully understood what it would be like for someone my own age living in a camp such as this one. The things she had to deal with just aren't what a girl my age should be dealing with, but obviously Gerda had no choice. I cannot even imagine what it would feel like to watch my family be torn apart,

or watch my friends slowly drop like flies as the Germans worked them to the bone. Honestly, no one can relate to what these people went through. Now, after reading this book, I realized how I take many things for granted, like food that my parents put on my plate every night. I mean I never even thought of a life without it, and even my family itself. What would I do without them, they give me so much support in my everyday life. It is unfortunate that Gerda wasn't able to be with them during such a rough time like the holocaust. She may have had her good friends from Bielitz but that could never fill the "holes" of missing family members. I would recommend this book to anyone, because we can all learn a lesson for this woman. You will laugh and cry, and from the first page you will be drawn in by her descriptions and all her experiences during the holocaust that you will just have to read it cover to cover.

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