

A TRAIN NEAR MAGDEBURG

Young Adult Edition

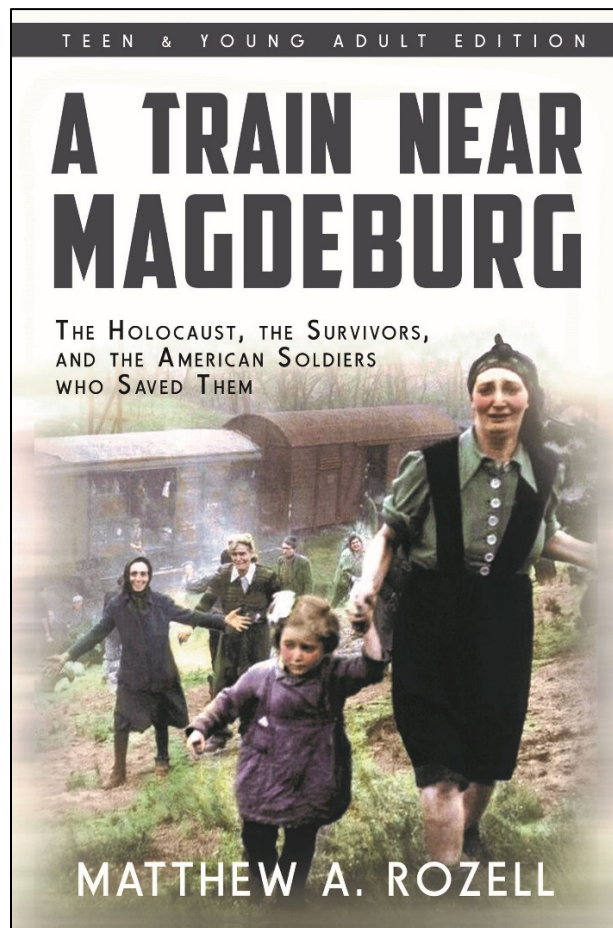
A STUDENT COMPANION

Reading. Thinking. Bearing Witness.

It's not for my sake, it's for the sake of humanity, that you will remember.

— Stephen B. Barry, Holocaust Survivor

Based on the book by Matthew A. Rozell
With USHMM-aligned discussion, reflection, and vocabulary
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A Letter to You, the Reader

You are holding a book about real people.

Not characters. Not symbols. Real human beings who were your age — or younger — when their world was taken from them. Eleven-year-old Sara, who made bets with other children about who would die next, because it was the only way to keep living. Thirteen-year-old Fred, who watched his grandfather’s friends turn on him in the park they had all shared for years. Eighteen-year-old Leslie, who weighed seventy-five pounds by the time he shuffled onto the train. And twenty-four-year-old Red Walsh, a tank commander from upstate New York who didn’t know any of them existed — until one April afternoon when his tank came around a bend in a German road and everything changed.

This companion is yours to write in, argue with, and dog-ear. It is not a test prep guide. It is an invitation to think — carefully, honestly, and sometimes uncomfortably — about the most catastrophic event in modern history and what it still means for the world you live in today.

Each section of this companion walks alongside a section of the book. You’ll find:

- Context boxes that give you the historical background you need to understand what’s happening.
- Voices from the book — survivors and soldiers in their own words — to pause on.
- “Think About It” questions for discussion.
- “In Your Journal” prompts for private reflection and writing.
- Vocabulary you’ll need to read and discuss this history with precision.

A few things to know before you start:

- This material is hard. It is supposed to be. The Holocaust was the systematic murder of six million Jewish people and millions of others. You may feel sad, angry, confused, or numb. All of those are honest responses. Don’t perform an emotion you don’t feel — and don’t shut down the one you do.
- There are no stupid questions here. Most adults don’t know enough about this history either. You are learning something real.
- The goal is not to horrify you. It is to help you understand. Understanding is harder — and more important — than horror.
- By the time you finish this book, you will know more about the Holocaust than most people around you. That knowledge belongs to you. The last question in this guide asks what you’ll do with it.

“*What You Do Matters.*”

How to Use This Companion

A quick guide before you begin

Think of this companion as a conversation partner — something you read alongside the book, not after it. Here’s the rhythm:

Before each section

Read the “Before You Read” box. It gives you a few things to watch for and some context to carry into the chapter. Don’t skip it — it’ll make the reading richer.

While you read

The companion moves chapter by chapter and section by section, roughly matching the book’s structure. When you hit a “Words to Know” box, those terms are about to appear — or have just appeared — in the text. The full vocabulary guide is at the back if you want more detail on any word.

After each section

You’ll find two kinds of questions. “Think About It” questions are for discussion — in class, in a small group, or just in your head. “In Your Journal” prompts are for writing, privately or to share. You don’t have to do every question. Do the ones that grab you.

At the end

The final section asks the big question the book builds toward: “What do you want the world to be?” That’s not a throwaway question. It’s the whole point.

A note on the voices in this book

Every person who speaks in this book is real. The survivors were children and teenagers when these events happened. The soldiers were young men, many of them barely older than you. When you read their words, remember: they chose to tell these stories so that someone — you — would know. That is a gift. Treat it carefully.

Introduction

The photograph. The question. The beginning.

Before You Read This Section

- The book opens with a photograph taken on April 13, 1945. Look at the description of it carefully. What details does the author point out? What questions does it raise?
- The author is a history teacher who spent his career in the same small town. Think about why that matters — who were his sources? How did he find this story?

- Notice how the Introduction is structured: it begins at the end, then asks “why?” Pay attention to that pattern — the whole book works this way.

What We Are Talking About

Before anything else, let’s be precise. The word “Holocaust” comes from a Greek word meaning a burnt offering. Most scholars now agree it is an inadequate name for what it describes. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defines the Holocaust as:

“
The systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.
”
— United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Every word in that definition matters. Systematic: it followed a plan. Bureaucratic: it used the machinery of government, paperwork, and administration. State-sponsored: it was official policy. Persecution and murder: it was both — first one, then the other, over twelve years. Six million Jews: people with names, families, histories, and futures.

Words to Know

Holocaust The systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime, 1933–1945.

Perpetrator A person who carries out a crime or atrocity.

Bystander A person who witnesses events and does not act.

Upstander A person who witnesses injustice and chooses to help.

Liberator A person or soldier who frees others from captivity or oppression.

The Photograph

The book is built around a single photograph (cover and introduction) taken by Major Clarence L. Benjamin of the 743rd Tank Battalion on April 13, 1945. The author describes it in precise detail: a woman and her young daughter walking up a hill toward the camera, toward the tanks. The woman is reaching out. The little girl looks terrified.

That photograph sat in a soldier’s dresser drawer for decades. It was almost never seen. What finally surfaced it — a daughter’s question, a summer afternoon interview, a camera still running — is part of the story this book tells. The point is: history nearly disappeared. It required people making choices — to ask, to listen, to save, to share — to survive.

◆ Think About It

1. The author says trying to understand the Holocaust is like entering a room with a dozen doors — each one leads to another room with more doors. What do you think he means? Have you ever felt that way about a topic you started to learn about?

2. Why do you think Major Benjamin buried the photograph in his official report, and it was kept in a drawer for decades? What might have made it difficult to share?
3. The author tells us that two-thirds of millennials [current age grouping 30 to 45] surveyed didn't know what Auschwitz was, and twenty-two percent weren't sure they'd heard of the Holocaust. Does that surprise you? Why do you think that might be?

In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

4. Brainstorm some words that come to mind when you think about the Holocaust. Write a few sentences about what you already know about the Holocaust — or think you might know. Don't worry about being right. At the end of the book, you'll come back to this and see what has changed.
5. The author says he wrote this book because “What You Do Matters.” What do you think he means by that, before you've read the rest? Write down your first instinct.

BOOK ONE: The Holocaust

Chapters 1–7 — Bergen-Belsen, Germany, Poland, Holland, Hungary

Entering Book One

Book One moves backward in time — and outward across Europe — to help you understand where the people on the train came from, and what was done to them before April 13, 1945. You will meet survivors as children and teenagers. You will learn the history of how a democratic country turned itself into a killing state. And you will begin to ask the question that runs through the whole book: How does this happen?

The author writes: “I have chosen to let the young people tell the stories themselves.” As you read, listen to those voices. They chose to speak. Your job is to hear them.

Chapters 1 – 2: A Place Called Bergen-Belsen / The Last Transport

Before You Read This Section

- Bergen-Belsen was not an industrialized mass murder gas chamber camp — but by spring 1945 it had become one of the deadliest places on earth. Why? Pay attention to how the author explains what this camp was, and how it changed.
- Notice the ages of the survivors speaking in Chapter 1. Many are children. As you read, think: what does childhood look like here?
- The chapter ends with survivors leaving on foot toward a train. Watch how each person remembers this walk differently. Memory is personal — that's one of its most important qualities.

◆ **What was Bergen-Belsen?**

Bergen-Belsen was not built as a death camp with gas chambers. It began as a prisoner-of-war camp, then became an "exchange camp" — holding Jews with foreign papers who might be traded to the Allies for German nationals or cash. By February 1945, however, it had become something else entirely: a vast, catastrophic dumping ground for tens of thousands of prisoners evacuated from camps further east as the Allies closed in.

The crematorium broke down. The water supply failed. Typhus swept through. On the day the British arrived — April 15, 1945 — they found 60,000 prisoners in various stages of starvation and illness, with thousands of unburied dead. Eight hundred people died on the day of liberation. Fourteen thousand more died in the weeks that followed.

The camp's commandant, Josef Kramer, is important to understand. He is not a monster from a film. He is an ordinary man who joined the SS in 1932 because he needed work. He rose through the ranks by following orders. At his trial, he admitted forcing victims into gas chambers at Auschwitz. His ordinariness is the point — and one of the most disturbing things in the entire book.

Words to Know

Concentration camp A place where large numbers of people were imprisoned under harsh conditions; not all camps had gas chambers.

SS The Nazi "protection squadron" that ran the camp system; selected for total loyalty to Hitler.

Kapo A prisoner appointed by the SS to police other prisoners in exchange for privileges.

Appell Forced daily roll call; prisoners stood for hours regardless of weather or illness.

Typhus A deadly disease spread by lice; it ravaged Bergen-Belsen in 1945, killing hundreds per day.

Voices: What the Survivors Remembered

These are the people whose words you carry through the whole book. Take a moment with each one.

SARA GOTTDIENER ATZMON · Age 11 at Bergen-Belsen

"At Bergen-Belsen I graduated from the University of Death. For me it was always cold... I had become an old woman already, eleven and a half years old."

Sara became a painter after the war. She said she painted because words were not enough.

KURT BRONNER · Age 18 at Bergen-Belsen

"You are on this side of the fence, and on the other side is your mother, and there is nothing you can do. And that is the last time that I saw my mother."

Kurt never found out what happened to his mother. Thousands of women vanished without names, into mass graves.

URI ORLEV · A young teenager from Warsaw

“I invented a story that this war, this ghetto, the Germans, the camp, all this never existed. What really happened was that I was the son of the Emperor of China, and this was a dream.

Uri survived. He later became an internationally celebrated children’s author.

LESLIE MEISELS · Age 17, weighed 75 pounds on departure

“When I entered Bergen-Belsen, I was a strong, robust, marching 175-pound 17-year-old. Four months and three days later, I was a shuffling skeleton, 75 pounds, barely able to move.”

FRED SPIEGEL · Nearly 13, imprisoned with his young sister, no parents

“We were a ragged group with tattered clothes... Some people in our column fell and were left by the wayside. Then, suddenly a small girl fell, and a German guard hurriedly picked her up... I noticed the guard was crying.”

Fred wondered: was the guard crying out of pity — or because he knew Germany was losing?

◆ Think About It

6. Uri Orlev invented a fantasy to survive. Sara Gottdiener made dark jokes with other children. These are coping strategies under impossible conditions. What do they tell us about the human need to find some kind of control or meaning, even in the worst circumstances?
7. Kurt Bronner lied to his mother about his father’s death so she wouldn’t be burdened. He was eighteen. What does this kind of love look like? How do you think about it?
8. The Custodian of the Book of Names works to identify the people who died at Bergen-Belsen — fewer than half of 120,000 have been named. Why does it matter so much to give back someone’s name? What is lost when a name is lost?
9. Fred Spiegel described a German guard crying as a little girl fell on the march. The author asks: was the guard crying out of pity, or because the war was ending? Does the reason change anything? Does it matter why someone does a decent thing?

✍ In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

10. Sara says she “became an old woman at eleven and a half.” What do you think she means? Have you ever experienced something that made you feel suddenly older — even if it was nothing like this? What is she describing?
11. Uri Orlev used his imagination to survive. Write about a time you used your imagination — a story, a game, a daydream — to get through something difficult. How is that the same as what Uri did, and how is it different?

12. Write a paragraph about someone in your family who is your age now. Just describe them — what they like, what they're afraid of, what they want. Then ask: what if their world had been taken away at this moment? That is what this book is about.

Chapters 3 – 4: Darkness Descends / Lost in Germany

Before You Read This Section

- These chapters step back in time to ask: how did Germany become a country that did this? Pay close attention to the sequence of events — each one feels survivable, until it isn't.
- You'll visit several historical sites through the author's eyes: Hadamar, Wannsee, Ravensbrück, Berlin. He is your guide. Notice what affects him most.
- Watch for ordinary people making choices — butcher's sons, retired policemen, neighbors. This is where the question "how does this happen?" starts to have answers.

◆ The Rise of the Nazi State, 1933–1938

Adolf Hitler came to power on January 30, 1933 — legally, through democratic elections. This is one of the most important and uncomfortable facts of the Holocaust. The German people voted for him. A parliament voted to give him emergency powers. A population approved by ninety percent in a referendum.

What followed was incremental. A one-day boycott of Jewish businesses. A law banning Jews from government jobs. Then from professions. Then from schools. Then from citizenship itself. The Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 made it illegal for a Jew and a non-Jew to be in love. Each step felt survivable. No single step announced the catastrophe to come.

On the night of November 9–10, 1938 — Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass — the state organized a nationwide pogrom. Thousands of Jewish shops were destroyed. Hundreds of synagogues burned. Thirty thousand Jewish men were arrested. The costs of the destruction were billed to the Jewish community.

Fred Spiegel was six years old when Kristallnacht hit his hometown. His testimony transforms policy into a person.

FRED SPIEGEL · Age 6, Dinslaken, Germany, November 10, 1938

"When I arrived upstairs, they were up and waiting for me... When I asked them about the smoke, they said the synagogue was on fire, but the fire engines were there. "Not to worry, Fritz. The fire will surely be put out soon.""

The Brockhausens — the retired policeman and his wife upstairs — tried to protect the Spiegel family. They were not Jewish. They chose to help anyway.

◆ The T-4 Program: How Genocide Learns

Before the mass murder of Jews, the Nazi state practiced on another group: Germans with physical and mental disabilities. The secret T-4 euthanasia program, run from an address in Berlin (Tiergartenstrasse 4), authorized doctors and nurses to murder children and adults deemed "life unworthy of life." School buses with blacked-out windows drove through towns. The children inside were gassed.

The program is not the Holocaust — but it developed the technology and bureaucratic logic that would be used in the Holocaust. Gas chambers, deliberate deception of victims, falsification of death records, coordination between doctors and the state: all were refined here first.

The author visits Hadamar, one of the killing centers, and quotes a school principal whose words have become famous in Holocaust education: "Help your children become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, or educated Eichmanns." What does education have to do with genocide? That is the question.

◆ Wannsee and the Final Solution

On January 20, 1942, fifteen Nazi officials met for approximately ninety minutes at a villa on a lake near Berlin. They did not decide to kill the Jews — mass murder was already underway on the Eastern Front. They coordinated the logistics: which government agencies would be responsible, what the bureaucratic language would be, how to handle people of "mixed" heritage.

The language of the meeting is one of the most important things to study: "evacuation," "resettlement," "special treatment." These words mean deportation to killing centers, gassing, murder. The perpetrators used euphemism to disguise genocide — from the outside world, from each other, and from history.

The author notes that his group of teachers spent more time at the villa than the fifteen officials who planned the murder of millions. The conference lasted ninety minutes.

Words to Know

Kristallnacht "Night of Broken Glass" — state-sponsored pogrom, November 9–10, 1938.

Pogrom Violent, organized attack on a community; in Holocaust history, attacks on Jews.

Nuremberg Race Laws 1935 laws stripping Jewish Germans of citizenship and banning marriage with non-Jews.

T-4 program Secret Nazi program that murdered disabled Germans — the first use of gas chambers.

Final Solution Nazi code phrase for the plan to murder all Jews in Europe. A deliberate euphemism.

Euphemism A mild word used in place of a harsher one; here, used to hide mass murder in plain language.

◆ Think About It

13. Hitler came to power legally — through elections. The German parliament voted to give him dictatorial powers. Ninety percent of Germans approved in a referendum. What does this tell us about the relationship between democracy and genocide? How did democracy fail itself?
14. The persecution of Jews in Germany was incremental — one law at a time, over years. At what point do you think it became impossible to leave? Can you now explain why is it too simple to say "they should have just gone"?
15. The Wannsee Conference used language like "evacuation" and "special treatment" to describe mass murder. Why would the perpetrators use this kind of language? What does it tell us that they felt they needed to hide what they were doing — even from themselves?
16. The T-4 program killed disabled Germans before the Holocaust began. One of its goals was to convince people that some lives were "unworthy." Why is that idea so dangerous? Where do you see similar language today — the idea that some people matter less?

In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

17. Fred Spiegel was excluded from his park, then his school, then his neighborhood. Each step was small. Write about a time you witnessed someone being gradually excluded from a group — a friend group, a team, a table at lunch. How did each step feel? Did anyone stop it?
18. The principal's note found at Hadamar says schools must help children "become human." What do you think that means? What does a school or teacher do that makes students more — or less — human?
19. Write a short paragraph explaining, in your own words, how a democratic country became a country that built gas chambers and crematoriums use in the perpetration of mass murder. Use specific details from what you've read.

Chapters 5 – 7: The Ash Yards of Poland / A Child in Holland / Hungary is Judenrein

Before You Read This Section

- These chapters move outward from Germany to show how the Holocaust spread across all of occupied Europe — to Poland, the Netherlands, and Hungary. The survivors' voices multiply.
- Chapter 5 is the longest and most difficult. You will visit Auschwitz, the Warsaw Ghetto, and several killing centers. Read carefully but take breaks if you need them.
- Pay attention to the concept of resistance. Resistance in this history does not always mean fighting with weapons. Look for other forms of resistance, other than the use of force.

◆ The Warsaw Ghetto and Aliza's Story

Before World War II, Warsaw had the largest Jewish population of any city in Europe outside New York — 350,000 people. When Germany occupied Poland, they forced Warsaw's Jews into a walled ghetto of just 1.3 square miles. Over 400,000 people were crowded inside.

Aliza Melamed was a teenager in the Warsaw Ghetto. Her diary and memoir, from which the author draws, are among the most powerful testimonies in the book. She joined a Zionist youth organization that became part of the underground resistance. When the mass deportations to the Treblinka killing center began in 1942, Aliza survived by hiding.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 1943 — the Passover eve before Hitler's birthday — was led by young fighters like Aliza's friends. They knew they would lose. They chose to fight anyway, not to win, but to die as human beings, not as victims. The leader, twenty-four-year-old Mordechai Anielewicz, died in battle. His organization's slogan: "All are ready to die as human beings."

ALIZA MELAMED VITIS-SHOMRON · Teenager, Warsaw Ghetto, 1942

"I remembered I had to survive to tell the world about my friends who were killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. I hugged my mother and sister. They mustn't separate us!"

Aliza made herself a witness. She believed that surviving to testify was an act of resistance. She wrote her memoir at age seventeen on a kibbutz in Israel.

◆ Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Epicenter

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest Nazi killing center, located in occupied Poland. The author visits it on his study tour and describes entering "the epicenter of evil." At its height in the summer of 1944 — during the deportation of Hungarian Jews — the camp murdered tens of thousands of people per day.

A map at the Wannsee Villa shows railway lines radiating outward from Auschwitz like tentacles, from Poland, Germany, Hungary, Greece, France, and the Netherlands. The trains came from everywhere.

The author makes a point that matters: the people who ran Auschwitz were not monsters. Rudolf Höss, the commandant who oversaw the murder of over a million people, was tried and hanged after the war — at Auschwitz itself. Dr. Josef Mengele, who performed pseudoscientific experiments on prisoners, escaped to Argentina and died of a stroke in 1979. Josef Kramer, whom we met at Bergen-Belsen, was executed by the British. In a photograph taken at the camp in 1944, they are all smiling. It is, the author writes, "a cigarette break; another day at the office."

◆ Hungary: The Last Wave

Hungary's Jews were among the last large communities to be targeted. The Hungarian government had made an alliance with Hitler in 1938, and while Jews faced antisemitic laws, they had not yet been deported. That changed on March 19, 1944, when German troops

occupied Hungary and SS officer Adolf Eichmann arrived with orders to make Hungary "judenrein" — Jew-free.

In just eight weeks in the summer of 1944, 440,000 Hungarian Jews were rounded up and deported, most to be murdered immediately at Auschwitz. This was the fastest mass deportation of the Holocaust.

Many of the survivors whose voices are central to this book — Irene Bleier, Leslie Meisels, Sara Atzmon, Agnes Fleischer — were Hungarian Jews. By a series of accidents, logistical complications, and what Leslie Meisels always called a miracle, their transport was not sent directly to Auschwitz but instead to slave labor in Austria, and then to Bergen-Belsen. That is why they are alive to tell their stories.

ARIELA LOWENTHAL · Age 11, leaving Bergen-Belsen

“Although I was only 11½ years old, my aunt listened to me. I probably had a very strong will to live.” ... “My aunt said to me, ‘You know that now is the Passover holiday— maybe God is bringing us to freedom.’”

Ariela had already lost both parents by the time she left Bergen-Belsen. She was eleven years old and making decisions that would save her life.

Words to Know

Ghetto A sealed area of a city where Jews were forced to live, cut off from the rest of the population.

Aktion Nazi term for the organized roundup and deportation of Jews to killing centers.

Judenrat Jewish councils forced by Nazis to administer ghetto life — including deportation lists.

Judenrein "Jew-free" — the Nazi goal for an area after all Jews had been removed or murdered.

Sonderkommando Jewish prisoners forced to remove bodies from gas chambers and operate crematoria.

Zionism The movement for a Jewish homeland in Palestine; many survivors emigrated to Israel after the war.

◆ Think About It

20. Aliza Melamed survived Bergen-Belsen and the train because she believed she had a duty to bear witness for her friends who died in the Uprising. What does it mean to survive for a purpose beyond yourself? Have you ever done something difficult because you felt you owed it to someone else?
21. The author uses a photograph from the Wannsee Villa showing three of the Holocaust's architects smiling on a cigarette break. He says they are not monsters — they are human beings. Why is it important — and uncomfortable — to accept that? What does it mean for how we understand evil?
22. Ariela Lowenthal was eleven years old and making life-or-death decisions because there were no adults left to make them for her. What is childhood supposed to protect you from? What happens when that protection is removed?

23. The Rosenstrasse Protest in Berlin in 1943 — where German wives of Jewish men publicly demanded their husbands' release — succeeded. Not one protester was shot. The men were released at the time. What does this tell us about what public resistance might have achieved? Why do you think it was so rare?

In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

24. The Jewish Fighting Organization's slogan was: "We shall not go like sheep to the slaughter." They chose to fight even knowing they would lose. Write about what you think it means to choose how you face something, even when you can't choose the outcome.
25. The author visits Auschwitz and says he and his group "just cannot" process it. Write about something you have encountered — in a book, a film, a story, real life — that you couldn't fully process. What does it feel like when something is too big to hold?
26. Using what you've read in Chapters 1–7, write a paragraph that answers this question: how does a country go from democracy to genocide in twelve years? What are the stages?

BOOK TWO: The Americans

Chapters 8–10 — Upstate New York, Normandy, and the Road to Germany

A different world. A different kind of young person.

Book Two switches everything: the setting, the country, the kind of danger. We move from the cattle cars and camps to the small towns of upstate New York, the beaches of Normandy, and the hedgerow country of France. We meet Carrol "Red" Walsh, George Gross, and the men of the 743rd Tank Battalion.

These men were not fighting to liberate concentration camp prisoners. Most had never heard the word "Holocaust." They were fighting to stay alive, do their job, and get home. And yet history was moving all of them — the survivors on the train and the soldiers in the tanks — toward the same point on the map, the same spring afternoon, the same moment of collision between two worlds.

As you read, notice the parallels: both groups are young. Both are trying to survive. Both are being changed by something enormous that they didn't choose and can't fully understand. The book is — among other things — the story of how they found each other.

Chapters 8 – 10: A Date with the Cosmos / A Time to Die / The Bulge and Beyond

Before You Read This Section

- The author begins by interviewing Red Walsh in 2001 — and Walsh almost doesn't mention the train. A daughter's question changes everything. Notice how close history comes to disappearing.
- The combat chapters are detailed and vivid. Don't just read for the facts — read for how Red Walsh talks about war. His voice is funny, warm, honest, and human. That is deliberate.
- Watch for the moment when Red accepts that he is going to die. It is one of the quietest and most extraordinary moments in the book.

CARROL "RED" WALSH · Tank commander, 743rd Tank Battalion

"I [was] twenty-four. I would have been in combat for ten months. That is a long time to survive — to survive ten months was to survive a hundred years! I could not even remember my former life... I was a fugitive from the law of averages."

◆ The 743rd Tank Battalion and the Road to Germany

Red Walsh was a law student from upstate New York. He enlisted out of shame — his friends were going to war and he wasn't. He was classified as having eyesight too poor for combat. He ended up in a Sherman tank anyway, landing in Normandy weeks after D-Day and fighting his way through France, Belgium, Holland, and into Germany.

The 743rd Tank Battalion was attached to the 30th Infantry Division — the "Old Hickory" division, nicknamed the "Workhorse of the Western Front." Their motto: "We Keep the Faith." Over ten months of combat, Red survived the hedgerows of Normandy, the Battle of Mortain, the freezing Siegfried Line, and the Battle of the Bulge. By April 1945 he had been in combat longer than most soldiers survive.

Red's friendship with fellow tank commander George Gross is one of the book's emotional anchors. They started as opposites crammed in the same steel box. They became brothers. George Gross, who took many of the liberation photographs, later became a professor of English literature. It was his essay about the train, posted on the author's website, that eventually helped to bring the survivors to find their liberators.

CARROL "RED" WALSH · Trapped in a German village, Thanksgiving eve, 1944

"During the night I realized that I was going to die. When I accepted this, I felt peaceful; there was nothing that I could do. I cannot explain it but to say that I was not troubled or panic-stricken. In fact, I was quiet — everyone in the tank was quiet."

GEORGE C. GROSS · Tank commander, 743rd Tank Battalion

"Carrol kept me sane through nine months of combat."

Words to Know

Sherman tank The primary American tank of WWII; reliable but outmatched by heavier German models; gasoline-powered and prone to fire.

D-Day / Operation Overlord The Allied invasion of Normandy, France, June 6, 1944 — the largest sea-land-air assault in history.

Battle of the Bulge Germany's last major offensive, December 1944; the costliest battle in American military history.

Combat fatigue World War II term for what we now call PTSD — psychological breakdown from prolonged combat exposure.

Blitzkrieg "Lightning War" — German military strategy using fast, coordinated armor and air attacks.

◆ Think About It

27. Walsh's daughter asks her father: "Did you mention the train at all? That was kind of interesting." If she hadn't asked, the story might never have been told. What does this say about the fragility of memory and history? Who else might have a story like this that has never been asked for?
28. Red accepted his death one Thanksgiving night in a German village and found peace in that acceptance. Have you ever found unexpected calm in a moment of fear or difficulty? What does his experience tell us about how human beings handle the unbearable?
29. Red Walsh jokes and laughs even when describing terrible things. He threw wine bottles into his tank's ammunition rack. He talked back to a general. Why do you think the author includes these details? What does humor do in war — or in any extreme situation?
30. Red's tank commander Schultsie eventually reached his breaking point — vomiting, unable to eat. Red arranged for him to be removed from combat. He says: "I really loved that man and he was no coward." What is the difference between being unable to continue and being a coward? Does it matter?

✍ In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

31. Red says combat was ten months during which he "could not even remember his former life." The survivors describe something similar — a suspension of normal existence. Write about a time when your ordinary life felt very far away. What brought you back?
32. George and Red started as opposites and became brothers. Write about a relationship in your life — or one you've read about — where shared difficulty created an unexpected bond. What is it that difficult experiences do to the space between people?
33. Write a journal entry as a nineteen-year-old American soldier on June 6, 1944 — D-Day, before the landing. You don't know what's going to happen. What are you thinking about?



George C. Gross and Carrol 'Red' Walsh.
Somewhere in Europe, 1945. Credit: George Gross.

BOOK THREE: Liberation: A Collision of Worlds

Chapters 11–13 — Farsleben, Germany, April 13, 1945

The moment everything converges.

For six days the survivors have been on the train. For ten months the soldiers have been in combat. On April 13, 1945 — the day after Franklin Roosevelt died, the day that would have been the deadline for the train to be blown up on the Elbe bridge — Major Benjamin's jeep and two Sherman tanks came around a bend in a German road and found a train.

The survivors describe liberation in ways that are not what you might expect. Not pure joy. Not instant relief. Something more complicated, more human, and in many ways more moving. Read these chapters slowly.

Chapters 11 – 13: What the Soldiers Saw / The Americans Are Here / I'll Never Forget Today

Before You Read This Section

- The liberation is told from both sides simultaneously. Read the soldiers' descriptions first, then the survivors'. What do they notice? What do they miss? What can only be seen from one side?
- Pay attention to the first words exchanged. Language becomes crucial at the moment of contact.
- Notice that liberation did not mean immediate safety. The war was still going on. Typhus was spreading. People were still dying.

GEORGE C. GROSS · *First sight of the train*

“Our taking of the train, therefore, was no great heroic action but a small police operation. The heroism that day was all with the prisoners on the train.”

CARROL “RED” WALSH · At the train

“I had no idea who they were, where they had come from, where they were going — nothing. No idea... I was not aware of the extent of the horror that was perpetrated on the Jewish people.”

LT. CHARLES M. KINCAID · Letter to his minister, April 17, 1945

“I saw a sight that’s impossible to describe... I’ll never forget today... I was going to write Mother tonight but thought better of it. I’ll be in a better frame of mind tomorrow.”

And from the other side:

ALIZA MELAMED VITIS-SHOMRON · Age 17, at the train

“I ran towards the tank, laughing hysterically. It stopped. I embraced the wheels, kissed the iron plates. The amazed soldier who came out called his friends and they immediately started throwing chocolate to us.”

LESLIE MEISELS · Age 17, at the train

“Suddenly a huge cry went up. When I looked over to the top of that little embankment, I saw some dirty, sweating American soldiers — the most beautiful human beings imaginable — appear with their guns ready... I remember going back and forth between that pot of beets and the door of the wagon, telling my mother and brothers that we were free, crying at the same time.”

STEVE BARRY · Age 20, watching the liberators

“A GI walked down the embankment, came over to the fire, sat next to me, took out his pen knife, and he cut off the SS insignia from my coat, and slowly dropped it into the fire... It was an unbelievable symbol to me. And all I can tell you is, it still touches me very deeply, and probably always will.”

SARA ATZMON · Age 12, on the liberating soldiers

“For the first time after going through sheer hell, I felt that there was such a thing as simple love coming from good people — young men who had left their families far behind, who wrapped us in warmth and love and cared for our well-being.”

IRENE BLEIER · Age 18, newly liberated

“Reality did not penetrate my consciousness. My senses were incapable of experiencing any signs of emotion; I had no tears of joy that appeared, nor even the slightest smile... We are liberated, but only outwardly.”

She adds: “It will take a good many years to be free completely.”

KURT BRONNER · Age 19, on knowing he was free

“One student asked me, ‘When did you know that you were free?’ And I tell them: when I went to the bathroom, and closed the door, by myself, alone, in privacy, that is when I knew I was free. I had my dignity.”

◆ What Liberation Really Looked Like

Liberation was not a happy ending. It was the beginning of a long, difficult next chapter. The survivors on the train were too weak to walk far. Typhus was spreading.

Many did not know whether any of their family members were alive. Some died in the days after liberation from disease or from eating too fast after starvation.

The American soldiers were unprepared for what they found. They had not been told about concentration camps. Red Walsh's first question was: “What are we going to do with these people?” George Gross stayed with the train for twenty-four hours. The 30th Division's liaison officer, Frank Towers, organized trucks to move the survivors to a captured German air base at Hillersleben, where medics from the 95th Medical Battalion would care for them for seven weeks.

The German mayor of nearby Farsleben refused to cooperate until an American officer held a pistol to his head. Others were fearful of these people who suddenly appeared on their doorstep. The German civilian population — who had lived under the Nazi regime for years — had to interact with people they generally had never acknowledged.

◆ Think About It

34. George Gross said “the heroism that day was all with the prisoners on the train.” Red Walsh said he had “no idea” what he was looking at. What does it mean that the liberation of thousands of people was “accidental” or by chance — that no one planned it, no one was trained for it, it just happened? The author has stated, quoting survivors, that “there are no coincidences.” How do we reconcile these interpretations?
35. Several survivors describe not feeling joy at the moment of liberation — Irene Bleier says she felt nothing. Others, like Aliza, describe laughing hysterically. Why might the same moment feel so different to different people? What does this tell us about trauma and the complexity of emotion?
36. Kurt Bronner says he knew he was free when he could close a bathroom door alone. Steve Barry says he knew when a GI cut the SS insignia off his coat and dropped it in the fire. What do these small, private moments tell us about what freedom actually is — not as an idea, but as an experience?

37. Lieutenant Kincaid wrote to his minister but not to his mother. He said he'd be "in a better frame of mind tomorrow." Why do you think soldiers and survivors alike often couldn't share what they had seen, even with people they loved?

In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

38. Bruria Bodek-Falik went into a German village looking for food and knocked on a door. The woman who answered felt her head — looking for horns, she later learned, because that was what she had been taught Jews had. Bruria was thirteen years old and starving. What does this tell us about what propaganda actually does to people — not the people it targets, but the people who believe it? The woman wasn't a camp guard. She was an ordinary person in a village. Does that make it better or worse?
39. Irene Bleier waited months for liberation. She believed in it. She prayed for it. When the Americans arrived she ran toward them — and felt absolutely nothing. No tears. No smile. "We are liberated, but only outwardly," she writes. Before you explain why, sit with that word: outwardly.
- What does her numbness tell us about freedom that a cheering crowd never could? Look for Irene later in the book. Does the gap ever close — and if so, what closes it?
40. The German mayor of Farsleben refused to help the survivors until an American officer held a pistol to his head. Days later, he murdered his wife and killed himself. His town was half a mile from where 2,500 people had been dying on a train for six days. What do you think the mayor knew, and when? The book doesn't answer this directly — but it asks you to think about the civilians who lived beside the history. What is the responsibility of an ordinary person who knows something terrible is happening nearby?

BOOK FOUR: Reunion

Chapters 14–21 — *The long afterward, and the question that closes the book*

History doesn't end in 1945.

Most stories about the Holocaust end with liberation. This one doesn't. Book Four follows the survivors and soldiers across the decades: through years of silence, through the slow building of new lives, through denial and anger and grief — and finally into the extraordinary reunions that Matthew Rozell made possible through his teaching.

An email arrives in 2006 from Australia: "I was a child on that train." Then another. Then dozens. Elderly survivors find elderly soldiers. Grandchildren meet grandchildren. And the question at the center of it all — what is memory for, and what do we owe the dead? — finally gets its answer.

Chapters 14–21: The Long Aftermath, Denial, Reunion, and the Final Question

Before You Read This Section

- Book Four covers many years quickly. Notice how the author weaves the past and present together — 2001 interviews, 2006 emails, 2009 reunions, 2016 Jerusalem. Time doesn't move in a straight line in this book.
- The chapter on Holocaust denial is important. Read it carefully and think about the difference between not knowing and deliberately refusing to know.
- The book ends in Jerusalem, with a question. Don't skip to it — let the whole journey carry you there.

◆ The Silence After

Many survivors did not speak of their experiences for decades. Not to their children. Not to their therapists. Not to anyone. Irene Bleier Muskal wrote her memoir for her family alone; it remained unpublished until after her death. Steve Barry built a career, raised a family, and almost never mentioned Bergen-Belsen or the train.

This silence was not unusual. Survivors often felt that no one would believe them, or that speaking would reopen wounds that could not be safely reopened. Some wanted to protect their children from a past too heavy to share. Some simply didn't have the words.

The children of survivors — the "second generation" — grew up in households shaped by what was not said. Researchers now study what they call transgenerational trauma: the documented transmission of trauma's psychological effects to children and grandchildren, sometimes including biological changes in stress-response systems. The Holocaust did not end in 1945. Its effects are still being inherited.

PAUL ARATO · *Child survivor, first reunion with his liberators, 2009*

"I grew up and spent all my years being angry. This means I don't have to be angry anymore."

◆ Holocaust Denial

Within days of the first reunion in 2007, the author received emails denying that the Holocaust happened. He began archiving them as teaching material. Denial ranges from crude antisemitism to elaborate pseudo-historical arguments — but all of it shares the same goal: to erase the crime by erasing the evidence.

The author makes a critical distinction: denial is not the same as ignorance. A study found that two-thirds of American millennials didn't know what Auschwitz was — but that is a failure of education, not a deliberate lie. Holocaust denial is a politically motivated choice. Understanding the difference matters for how we respond to each.

Eisenhower, upon liberating the Ohrdruf subcamp in 1945, immediately ordered: "I want every American unit not in the front lines to see this place." He then cabled Washington a detailed account, adding that he had visited deliberately, "in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda." He already anticipated denial. He was right.

STEVE BARRY · Holocaust Survivor, at a school reunion

“It’s not for my sake, it’s for the sake of humanity, that you will remember.”

CARROL “RED” WALSH · In a letter to Steve Barry

“You do not owe us. We owe you. We can never repay you and the Jewish people of Europe for what was stolen from you — your homes, your possessions, your businesses, your money, your art, your family life, your families, your childhood, your dreams, and all your lives.”

STEVE BARRY · On receiving Walsh’s letter

“Is this a beautiful person?”

◆ The Reunions and What They Mean

Beginning in 2007, a series of extraordinary reunions brought survivors and soldiers together — some of them for the first time since April 13, 1945. Elderly men and women who had been children on the train met the elderly men who had been in the tanks. They wept. They laughed. They held each other’s hands.

Frank Towers, the 30th Division liaison officer who organized the survivors’ evacuation, spent his final years driving the reunions, emailing survivors, keeping databases, refusing to let the connections fade. He died on July 4, 2016, at age ninety-nine. The author was in Jerusalem when he got the news.

A note left at the House of Silence at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial reads: “If I could live my life again, I would find you sooner.” No one knows who wrote it.

“
If I could live my life again, I would find you sooner.
”

— Anonymous, House of Silence, Bergen-Belsen Memorial

Words to Know

Transgenerational trauma The transmission of trauma’s psychological effects across generations — to children and grandchildren of survivors.

Holocaust denial The deliberate, politically motivated refusal to acknowledge the Holocaust. A form of antisemitism.

Testimony A firsthand account of witnessed events; in Holocaust education, the moral act of speaking so others will know.

Oral history Historical research based on recorded interviews; the method this entire book is built on.

Yad Vashem Israel’s Holocaust memorial and research authority in Jerusalem; houses the world’s largest database of victim names.

◆ **Think About It**

41. Steve Barry doesn't say "remember this for us." He says "it's not for my sake" — he is releasing you from any debt to the survivors. He survived. He built a life. He isn't asking for your sympathy or your pity. So who is he asking you to remember for — and what does it mean that the answer is humanity, not him? Why does it matter to all of humanity that this is remembered, not just to those who lived it?
42. Red Walsh's letter says: "You do not owe us. We owe you." The soldiers were doing their job, they say. Some actively resisted the word "liberator." What does it mean to resist being called a hero? What does Walsh understand about responsibility that he is trying to express?
43. Paul Arato spent his whole life angry. Meeting his liberators freed him from that. Why do you think that happened? What does it mean for someone's inner life when they can finally put a human face on the moment that defined their survival?
44. Holocaust denial exists even with film footage, survivor testimony, perpetrators' own records, and physical evidence at preserved sites. Eisenhower anticipated this in 1945. What does the persistence of denial tell us about how motivated reasoning and ideology work? What is the most effective response to it?

✎ **In Your Journal**

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

45. Lily Cohen, the orphan survivor, now eighty years old, goes to talk to at-risk teenagers in Jaffa and tells them: "Maybe you are feeling like an outsider in a world that seems hostile, but you do not have to be a victim." What do you think it means to receive that message from someone who survived what she survived? What does she know about being an outsider that most people don't?
46. The author stands in Jerusalem and wonders what his role in all of this means. He has connected hundreds of survivors with the people who saved them. A granddaughter tells him his name means "mystery of God." Write about a moment when you were part of something that felt larger than yourself — something you didn't plan and couldn't fully explain.
47. Write a response to the anonymous note: "If I could live my life again, I would find you sooner." Who are you writing to? What would you have done sooner?

What Do You Want the World to Be?

The question that closes the book — and opens everything else

Near the end of his life, Holocaust historian Dr. Yehuda Bauer — one of the foremost scholars of the Holocaust in the world — was asked what the overarching lesson of the Holocaust is. He said:

“

There is no lesson, except not to repeat it. Maybe the real question to ask yourself is this: What do you want the world to be? And then, maybe it is time to introduce them to the study of the Holocaust, because maybe the Shoah is the exact opposite of what

”

they envision for their world.

— Dr. Yehuda Bauer, Holocaust historian, Yad Vashem, 2016

This guide has been building toward that question. Now it's yours.

Six things this book teaches, if you let it

1. Genocide does not arrive all at once.

It builds through incremental steps: a boycott, a law, a restriction, a registration, a star on a coat, a train. Each step feels survivable. No single step announces the catastrophe. Understanding this process is how we recognize when it might be happening somewhere — not how it has already ended, but how it is building.

2. Ordinary human beings did this. Ordinary human beings stopped it. Ordinary human beings survived it.

Josef Kramer joined the SS because he needed a job. The butcher's son delivered meat to the camp and thought the prisoners were subhuman — until he saw something that changed him. Red Walsh didn't plan to liberate anyone; he was following orders on a patrol. The word "monster" is a way of letting ourselves off the hook. The perpetrators were human beings, which means the capacity for this exists in human beings. So does the capacity to resist.

3. Every name is a world.

The Talmud says: whoever destroys a soul, it is as if they destroyed an entire world. The Custodian of the Book of Names at Bergen-Belsen. The stolperstein stumble stones in European sidewalks. The Yad Vashem database. All of these are acts of resistance against the erasure of personhood. You now know some names. Sara. Kurt. Irene. Ariela. Leslie. Fred. Aliza. Red. George. Frank. Those names are yours to keep.

4. Memory is a choice — and a responsibility.

The photograph sat in a drawer for decades. Red Walsh almost didn't mention the train. A daughter's question changed history. Memory does not preserve itself. It requires people who decide to ask, to listen, to save, to teach. You have just done that. What you do next is up to you.

5. Love crosses time.

The reunions between survivors and soldiers — between eighty-year-old grandparents and the men who had been in tanks — are among the most extraordinary things in modern memory. They were possible because people made choices: to record, to search, to reach out, to show up. The note at Bergen-Belsen says it: "If I could live my life again, I would find you sooner." Some connections are worth crossing decades to make.

6. You are the new witnesses.

The last survivors are passing from us. The last soldiers are gone. The responsibility of witness now belongs to those who listened to them. Matthew Rozell says it at the beginning of the book and at the end: "You will become the new witnesses, the new light." This is not a metaphor. The survivors spoke so that you would know. The question is what you do with what you know.

Your Final Journal Entry

This one is just for you — or to share, if you choose. There is no right answer. There is only your honest response to the journey you've just taken.

In Your Journal

Choose one — or do them all. There are no wrong answers here.

48. At the beginning of this companion, you wrote down what you already knew about the Holocaust. Go back and read it. What has changed? What do you understand now that you didn't then?
49. Dr. Bauer's question: What do you want the world to be? Answer it. Not what you think you should say — what you actually believe, after reading this book.
50. What are you going to do with what you know? It doesn't have to be grand. It can be one conversation, one question asked, one story told. What is the first thing?

“
What You Do Matters.
”

— a catchphrase of the USHMM, adopted as a theme propelling Matthew Rozell's work; Matthew Rozell is a Museum Teacher fellow but makes it clear that he does not speak for this institution or any other.

Vocabulary Appendix

All key terms — organized for quick reference

How to use this appendix

Terms are listed alphabetically within each section of the book. Each entry includes the definition and, where possible, a direct quote showing how the word appears in the book itself. Use this while reading when a term is unfamiliar, and return to it when reviewing for discussion.

Terms marked with footnote numbers come directly from the book's own endnotes — the author's own definitions.

Term	Definition & Context
Holocaust <i>Introduction</i>	<p>The systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators, 1933–1945. From a Greek word for "burnt offering" — widely considered an inadequate name for the scale of the crime.</p> <p>In the book: "Scholars of what we now refer to as the Holocaust tell us that it began on January 30, 1933."</p>
The Shoah <i>Introduction</i>	<p>Hebrew word for "catastrophe." The preferred term in many Jewish communities and in Israel for the Holocaust. Used by historian Dr. Yehuda Bauer near the book's end.</p>
Genocide <i>Introduction</i>	<p>The deliberate, systematic killing of a large group of people based on ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race. The Holocaust is classified as genocide. The word was coined after WWII specifically to describe what the Nazis did.</p>
Perpetrator <i>Introduction</i>	<p>A person who carries out a crime or atrocity. In Holocaust education, perpetrators range from Hitler and Himmler to ordinary soldiers and guards.</p>
Bystander <i>Introduction</i>	<p>A person who is present at events and does not act. At every level — individual neighbors, local governments, and entire nations — bystanders enabled the Holocaust.</p>
Upstander <i>Introduction</i>	<p>A person who witnesses injustice and actively chooses to help. The opposite of a bystander. The book contains several examples, including the Brockhausen family in Dinslaken.</p>
Antisemitism <i>Introduction</i>	<p>Hatred of or prejudice against Jewish people. The author defines it in the text as "Jew-hatred." Nazi antisemitism was elevated to official state policy and ultimately became the foundation for genocide.</p>
Propaganda <i>Introduction</i>	<p>Information — often misleading or false — used to promote a political cause. The Nazi propaganda ministry, led by Joseph Goebbels, was central to spreading antisemitism and building support for the regime.</p>

Term	Definition & Context
Concentration camp <i>Book One</i>	<p>A place where large numbers of people were imprisoned under harsh conditions. Not all concentration camps had gas chambers. Bergen-Belsen was primarily a camp for detention and, by 1945, a catastrophic collection point for dying prisoners from across the Reich.</p>
SS (Schutzstaffel) <i>Book One</i>	<p>The Nazi "protection squadron," responsible for running the concentration camp system and carrying out the Final Solution. Selected for fanatical loyalty to Hitler. Wore black uniforms with a death's-head insignia.</p>
Kapo <i>Book One</i>	<p>A concentration camp prisoner appointed by the SS to supervise other prisoners in exchange for privileges such as more food or better conditions. Operated under extreme coercion. The USHMM cautions against judging kapos without understanding the conditions they faced.</p> <p>In the book: <i>"They were prisoners selected by the SS as volunteers to supervise their fellow prisoners in exchange for privileges." (Footnote [1])</i></p>
Appell <i>Book One</i>	<p>German for "roll call." The daily forced assembly at which all prisoners — including the sick and dying — had to stand for hours while guards counted them. A primary tool of systematic dehumanization.</p>
Typhus <i>Book One</i>	<p>A deadly bacterial disease spread by body lice. Ravaged Bergen-Belsen in early 1945, killing hundreds per day. Continued to kill survivors even after liberation. Anne Frank died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen.</p>
Crematorium <i>Book One</i>	<p>A facility for burning the bodies of the dead. At Bergen-Belsen the crematorium broke down in early 1945, causing bodies to pile up across the camp and accelerating the epidemic.</p>
Kristallnacht <i>Book One</i>	<p>"Night of Broken Glass." The state-sponsored pogrom of November 9–10, 1938, during which Nazi paramilitaries and civilians attacked Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues across Germany and Austria. Fred Spiegel was six years old when it struck his hometown.</p> <p>In the book: <i>"I heard somebody smashing down the door, and the noise of breaking glass." — Fred Spiegel</i></p>
Pogrom <i>Book One</i>	<p>A Russian word meaning "to wreak havoc, to demolish violently." In Holocaust history: organized, violent attacks on Jewish communities. Kristallnacht was a state-sponsored pogrom designed to look spontaneous. (Footnote [3])</p>
Nuremberg Race Laws <i>Book One</i>	<p>Antisemitic laws passed in 1935 at the Nazi party rally in Nuremberg, stripping German Jews of citizenship and forbidding marriage or sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. A legal foundation for the persecution that followed.</p>
T-4 Euthanasia Program <i>Book One</i>	<p>Secret Nazi program (named for its headquarters at Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin) that authorized the murder of Germans with physical or mental disabilities, deemed "life unworthy of life." Killed an estimated 200,000 people and developed the gas chamber technology later used in the Holocaust.</p>
Einsatzgruppen <i>Book One</i>	<p>German for "task forces." Mobile SS death squads that followed the German army into the Soviet Union in 1941, murdering Jewish populations by shooting them into mass graves. Killed over 1.5 million Jews.</p>

Term	Definition & Context
Wannsee Conference <i>Book One</i>	A January 20, 1942 meeting of fifteen Nazi officials at a Berlin villa, where the logistics of the "Final Solution" were coordinated. Lasted approximately ninety minutes. The author notes: "We teachers may have been in the building longer than the criminals who plotted the destruction of European Jewry."
Final Solution <i>Book One</i>	Nazi code phrase ("Endlösung") for the plan to murder all Jews in Europe. A deliberate euphemism using neutral-sounding language to disguise genocide.
Euphemism <i>Book One</i>	A mild or indirect word used in place of a harsh one. The Nazis used euphemisms throughout: "evacuation," "resettlement," "special treatment" all meant deportation to killing centers and murder.
Ghetto <i>Book One</i>	A sealed area of a city where Jews were forced to live, cut off from the rest of the population. The Warsaw Ghetto held over 400,000 people in just 1.3 square miles.
Aktion <i>Book One</i>	"Action" — the Nazi administrative term for the organized roundup and deportation of Jews to killing centers. A euphemism for mass murder operations. (Footnote [13])
Judenrat <i>Book One</i>	"Jewish council" — community leaders forced by the Nazis to administer ghetto life, including distributing food and compiling deportation lists. They operated under impossible conditions. (Footnote [14])
Judenrein <i>Book One</i>	Nazi term meaning "Jew-free" — describing an area from which all Jews had been removed by deportation or murder. A dehumanizing euphemism.
Sonderkommando <i>Book One</i>	Jewish prisoners forced to remove bodies from the gas chambers, extract gold teeth, and operate the crematoria at killing centers. They were periodically killed and replaced. (Footnote [18])
Kindertransport <i>Book One</i>	A rescue operation that brought nearly 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi Germany to Great Britain after Kristallnacht. Parents could not accompany the children. Most parents were later murdered.
Sherman tank <i>Book Two</i>	The primary American tank of World War II. Reliable and produced in large numbers, but outmatched by heavier German tanks; gasoline-powered and prone to fire when hit. Red Walsh's light tank was smaller and faster still.
D-Day / Operation Overlord <i>Book Two</i>	The Allied invasion of German-occupied Normandy, France, June 6, 1944 — the largest combined land-sea-air assault in history. The 743rd Tank Battalion landed on Omaha Beach that morning.
Battle of the Bulge <i>Book Two</i>	Germany's last major offensive on the Western Front, launched December 16, 1944 in the Ardennes. The costliest battle in American military history. The 743rd Tank Battalion and 30th Infantry Division were directly involved.
Combat fatigue <i>Book Two</i>	The World War II term for what we now call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Prolonged combat exposure caused psychological breakdown in many soldiers. Red's tank commander Schultsie reached this point during the fighting in Germany.

Term	Definition & Context
Blitzkrieg <i>Book Two</i>	"Lightning War." German military strategy using fast, coordinated armor and air attacks to overwhelm enemy forces. Used to overrun Poland (1939), France (1940), and in the invasion of the Soviet Union (1941). (Footnote [5])
Liberation <i>Book Three</i>	The act of freeing people from imprisonment or oppression. The liberation of the train near Magdeburg was unplanned. The book explores its complexity: liberation was not a simple happy ending, but the beginning of a long, difficult recovery.
Displaced Persons (DP) camp <i>Book Three / Four</i>	Temporary facilities set up after WWII to house survivors, refugees, and others with no home to return to. Many Holocaust survivors spent months or years in DP camps while waiting for countries to accept them as immigrants.
DDT <i>Book Three</i>	An insecticide used after WWII to control typhus-carrying lice. American medics applied it to survivors at liberation. It was later banned in the US in 1972 due to environmental damage. (Footnote [46])
Transgenerational trauma <i>Book Four</i>	The documented transmission of trauma's psychological effects from survivors to their children, grandchildren, and beyond. Many children of Holocaust survivors grew up in households shaped by unspoken grief and anxiety.
Holocaust denial <i>Book Four</i>	The deliberate, politically motivated refusal to acknowledge that the Holocaust happened, or to minimize its scale. Considered a form of antisemitism. Illegal in several countries. Distinguished from ignorance, which is a failure of education rather than a deliberate lie.
Testimony <i>Book Four</i>	A firsthand account of witnessed events. The book is built on testimony — recorded interviews with survivors and soldiers. To give testimony is both a historical act and, in Holocaust education, a moral one.
Oral history <i>Book Four</i>	Historical research based on recorded interviews with participants. The author's entire career was built on this method — finding, recording, and preserving voices before they were gone.
Yad Vashem <i>Book Four</i>	Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, in Jerusalem. The world's largest database of Holocaust victim names. The name comes from Isaiah 56:5: "I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."
Survivors' guilt <i>Book Four</i>	The psychological experience of feeling guilty for having survived when others — often family members — did not. Common among Holocaust survivors. Paul Arato describes spending his whole life "being angry" until meeting his liberators finally freed him.
Bearing witness <i>Book Four</i>	The act of seeing, remembering, and speaking. In Holocaust education, bearing witness is both a duty and a gift — the survivors spoke so that someone would know. The author frames readers as "new witnesses."
Stolperstein <i>Book Four / One</i>	"Stumble stone." Small brass plaques embedded in European sidewalks, engraved with the names of former Jewish residents who were deported and murdered. Artist Gunter Demnig has installed over 100,000 across Europe.

A final word on language

Some of these words — "resettlement," "special treatment," "Final Solution" — are Nazi euphemisms: deliberate, bureaucratic language designed to disguise mass murder from the outside world and from history. Learning to recognize euphemism as a tool of oppression is one of the most important skills this book can teach. When language softens what is actually happening, pay attention to what it is hiding.

Other terms — kapo, Judenrat, sonderkommando — describe roles that Jewish prisoners were forced into under conditions of total coercion. The USHMM guidelines remind us: these roles must be understood in the context of impossible choices under threat of death, not judged by ordinary moral standards.

Going Further

Resources for curious readers

The book you've read is one door into a vast history. Here are places to go next.

Resource	What You'll Find There
USHMM <i>encyclopedia.ushmm.org</i>	The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's online encyclopedia. Every major topic in this book has a detailed, peer-reviewed article here. Start with the names of places and people you want to know more about.
Yad Vashem <i>yadvashem.org</i>	Israel's Holocaust memorial and research authority. Includes the world's largest database of victim names — search for individuals and find their stories. Also has an extensive photo archive and survivor testimonies.
USC Shoah Foundation <i>sfi.usc.edu</i>	Over 55,000 recorded testimonies from Holocaust survivors and witnesses, many available to view online. Founded by Steven Spielberg after making Schindler's List.
Matthew Rozell's Site <i>teachinghistorymatters.com</i>	The author's own website, with 13+ years of blog posts, photographs, reunion footage, and updates on the project that became this book. You can watch reunion videos and read survivor letters.
Facing History <i>facinghistory.org</i>	Curriculum and resources connecting Holocaust history to questions of identity, prejudice, and civic responsibility. Particularly good for connecting the history to the present.
Bergen-Belsen Memorial <i>bergen-belsen.de</i>	The official memorial site, including information about the Book of Names project, the history of the camp, and how to visit or contribute information about victims.
Arolsen Archives <i>arolsen-archives.org</i>	The world's most comprehensive archive on Nazi persecution, with records of 17.5 million people. You can search for individuals and request records about relatives.

If you want to read more survivor memoirs:

- Leslie Meisels — Suddenly the Shadow Fell (Azrieli Series)
- Fred Spiegel — Once the Acacias Bloomed
- Aliza Vitis-Shomron — Youth in Flames
- Elie Wiesel — Night
- Primo Levi — Survival in Auschwitz
- Viktor Frankl — Man’s Search for Meaning