



# Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz

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**Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz** Isabella Leitner

**The deeply moving true account of a young Jewish woman's imprisonment by the Nazis at the Auschwitz death camp.**

On May 29, 1944, the day after Isabella Katz's twenty-third birthday, she, her family, and all the Jews in the ghetto in Kisvárd, Hungary, were rounded up by Nazi storm troopers, packed into cattle cars, and deported to Auschwitz. There, Dr. Josef Mengele, the so-called Angel of Death, scrutinized the family and decided who would live—for a time—and who would die. Isabella and three of her sisters waged a daily battle to survive, giving one another strength, courage, and love, promising themselves that they would cheat the crematoriums and end each day alive.

Thirty years after she escaped from the Nazis, Isabella wrote this powerful and luminous memoir. Hailed by *Publishers Weekly* as “a celebration of the strength of the human spirit as it passes through fire,” *Fragments of Isabella* has become a classic of holocaust literature and human survival.

*This ebook features rare images from the author's estate.*

## Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz Details

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# **From Reader Review Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz for online ebook**

## **Angela M says**

Like so many others , I've been thinking about Elie Wiesel with the news of his recent death. Thinking about what he endured and how he turned the horrific experience of the concentration camps into a lifetime of standing up for the oppressed by teaching us that we cannot forget . I thought I might reread Night in tribute to him and I know that I will read it again one day. What I decided to do now was to read this memoir that I was fortunate enough to obtain from Open Road Media because we need all the reminders we can get that the holocaust never should have happened and should never happen again.

Beautifully written . I was hesitant to say that . How can one write so beautifully about unspeakable loss, horrendous treatment, hatred, about the death of millions of innocent people? I can say this because the writing is almost poetic in these brief "fragments" of the horror , the hunger , the death, the depth of sorrow and yet fragments of hope in this diary like memoir by Isabella Leitner. Isabella , her mother and five siblings were among the Jews who were evacuated on May 29, 1944 from a small town in Hungary to Auschwitz. Her father was in America seeking papers to bring his family there.

Like other memoirs of holocaust survivors, this is a difficult read, taking the reader to this unimaginable place in the camps but also the unimaginable place in her heart and soul. This is short in length and I could have read it in one sitting but I found myself stopping at times because it is gut wrenching, heartbreaking (cliche terms , I know but I can't find other words).

Isabella and her sisters sustained themselves with their mother's belief in humanity despite the hatred . "And when this is over .... With your lives, you can create other lives and nourish them. You can nourish your children's souls and minds, and teach them that man is capable of infinite glory. You must believe me." I find it almost incredulous that after all she endures that she does believe her mother. When she has her sons , "Mama, I make this vow to you: I will teach my sons to love life, to respect man, and to hate only one thing - war."

In the camp she was also sustained by a pact with her sisters - that they must all survive together . Then a new pact since the burden of trying to survive is too great . "Somebody will have to live. ....We cannot all die.... Some body must live to tell the tale." We are so fortunate that Isabella did live to tell the tale . This book needs to be read.

I want to thank my Goodreads friend Sue . If I hadn't read her review ( <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>) I would have missed this book. I also want to thank Open Road Media for making available these previously published books in electronic format .

Thanks to Open Road Media and NetGalley.

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## **Meaghan says**

A very short, fragmentary memoir of the author's experience in Auschwitz. Isabella, her four sisters, her brother and her mother were Hungarian Jews who were deported to Auschwitz in May 1944. (Their father

was in America by then. He got papers for them to emigrate but they arrived too late.) The mother and the youngest child were gassed immediately and the brother separated from the girls. In brief, two-or-three-page vignettes, Isabella recounts her efforts to keep her sisters all together and help them all survive. An afterword by Isabella's husband describes their trips to Europe decades later, and her revulsion of being around German people or even hearing the German language.

Many of these scenes are beautifully written and I think Holocaust lit junkies will enjoy this. It's so fragmentary, though, that the general reader who doesn't know all that much about Auschwitz or Nazi Europe would probably just find it confusing.

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## **Toni Osborne says**

### **A Memoir of Auschwitz**

In her memoir Ms. Leitner uses her writing skills to share with us her wartime experiences when she and her family were taken from their Hungarian home and deported to Auschwitz. The book was first published in 1978 and in 2016 "Open Road Media" provides us with updated digital format version of this deeply moving true account.

This book is slim, the sentences simple and the chapters short but the tone has depth and captures the horror of the Holocaust one page, one sentence and one paragraph at a time. In her years of detention she was a careful observer of both the horrors and acts of human kindness. She was able to escape during the five-mile march to Begen-Belsen and eventually freedom and immigration to the US.

Although, this is not my first book on the Holocaust her memoir nevertheless left an emotional experience and as a reader that did not live this horror I still have shivers each time I read the atrocities people do to others. Years later Ms. Leitner still experienced nightmares and was afraid that one day she will come face to face with one of the people who butchered her family.

This book is a beautifully written snippet (fragments) of life (death) during the Nazi regime.

I received this book from the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review. "This is the way I see it".

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## **Sue says**

Originally released in 1978, this memoir is a new Open Road digital production for today's readers. The experience is intense, in the moment, experiential, and the title perfectly expresses the style and content. After that day in May, 1944, Isabella's life became a series of moments, observations, on the road toward hoped for survival, never knowing what the next breath would bring. They were literally fragments of life, as she recalls them later and presents them to a world that sometimes chooses to forget. Every step, thought, breath, shudder, swallow and smell we experience though her is harrowing and also necessary if we are not to slip into forgetfulness of what some men are capable of doing to their fellow men.

The Holocaust in Europe took place over 70 years ago but is an ongoing lesson that must be remembered, Otherwise history repeats itself. Leitner was imprisoned with her family for being Jewish. She watched as many went or were selected for the crematoria. She survived to give us witness but it was a harrowing survival.

This memoir deserves, needs to be read.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in return for an honest review.

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### **Diane Barnes says**

I read Elie Wiesel's "Night" just a few days ago. Holocaust literature is not enjoyable or easy reading, but I felt it was a book that needed to be read, so I did. Then the library emailed me that this was being held, so I picked it up. I wasn't sure two such intense books within a short time frame was wise, but, after reading a couple of lighter books in between, I glanced through this one today.

Now, just a couple of hours later, I turned the last page. Only 112 pages of raw emotion and painful memories made "Fragments of Isabella" a very powerful book. This is not a straight narrative, but bits and pieces of her and her three sisters 9 months at Auschwitz.

Her mother and youngest sister went to the crematorium the day they arrived, another sister died at Bergen-Belsen after liberation, but she and her two other sisters survived, along with their brother. They all came to America after the war.

Amazingly, she was at Auschwitz the same time as Elie Wiesel, though they never met. His mother and baby sister were also chosen for the crematorium by Mengele on the day of arrival. His account was step by step, blow by blow; Isabella's was much more emotional. Her memories of her mother brought me to tears.

In retrospect, reading these two short accounts so close together gave me a much deeper feeling for the sufferings of the people in the camps. She was never able to forgive the Germans, and couldn't abide being near them or hearing the language. She married and had two sons, which she considered her revenge on Hitler. To begin to replace the six million he had killed.

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### **Donna Davis says**

Isabella Leitner was a Holocaust survivor, and she scribed her memoir using brief entries similar to a diary in format. The length is just 120 pages, about the size of a novella. I was asked to read and review this memoir free of charge before it was released digitally. Thanks go to Net Galley and Open Road Integrated Media for the invitation. This title was just released, so it is available now for purchase.

I confess I struggle with Holocaust memoirs these days. Part of me has decided not to read any more of them. I am out of the classroom, so my ability to educate young people of today about the horrors of the past is nearly at a standstill, apart from the knowledge I pass on to my grandchildren. Reading another Holocaust memoir isn't going to make the ending any better; it's always going to be horrifying, and heaven help me if I should become so accustomed to reading about the Holocaust that it doesn't affect me that way anymore.

So though I swear off Holocaust memoirs from time to time (and am doing so right now, again), when a

particular memoir is offered, frequently there is some aspect of this one that sets it apart from the crowd, and so it is with Isabella's memories. Not many survivors managed to get out with family members at their side; Isabella and her sisters were unusually clever and imaginative in finding ways to survive. This along with the invitation induced me to roll up my sleeves and revisit this calamitous part of history once more.

When the notorious Mengele motioned with his deadly white glove to send Isabella and one of her sisters to the extermination side, they found a way to creep back around and intermingle with the side selected to be kept alive as workers. At one point they escaped and found an outstanding hiding place...but before they were identified as missing, the Germans began cooking potatoes, a luxury Isabella and her sisters could not resist, and they slunk out of their haystack and into the food line. There are a number of these instances, and I found the short chapters merciful, because I could only read this in small bits and pieces.

Most powerful of all, as far as I am concerned, is the clear, unmistakable truth that Germans knew, absolutely had to know, exactly what was going on around them. As their own lives improved materially, they chose to look the other way as skeletal work crews of Jewish and other prisoners were marched directly down the main streets of towns and villages on a daily basis:

"Germany was one giant concentration camp, with Jews marching the length and breadth of the country, but these refined, sensitive Germans never saw us. Find me a German who ever saw me. Find me one who ever harmed us."

The memoir is of necessity harsh in its remembrance. The teaser for this story bills it as having been written for young adults, but the background material required to understand some of what is said requires a good deal of pre-teaching. In other words, if a teacher or home-school supervisor has run out of social studies time and is looking for a shortcut to make up for teaching about the Holocaust, this isn't it. Frankly, this reviewer and teacher wonders how a full unit regarding the Holocaust could be lower on the chain of important social studies curriculum than anything else, apart from possibly the Bill of Rights (for US students). But if one is determined to substitute one memoir for a longer unit that gives more information, use Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which stands on its own.

Finally, any teacher or prospective reader needs to consider exactly how searing this material is, and all the more so to the young mind; to Jewish readers; to anyone with triggers.

I should also mention that a bisexual guard at Auschwitz, a woman that was interested sexually in one of the prisoners, is referred to as "aberrant", not for being a guard at such a place, but for her sexual orientation.

Do I recommend this memoir to you? Those that are studying the Holocaust should read it; the fact that it's written by a survivor makes it a primary document. But those that are looking for an engaging, enjoyable slice of history should look elsewhere. There are no light moments, no surprisingly kindly individuals that go out of their way to help. It's a cold, hard story, and the only joy is provided up front when we learn that she gets out alive and not alone, as so many Holocaust survivors found themselves.

It's a hard, hard lesson, but given that revisionists are diligently trying to deny that the Holocaust actually occurred, attempting to rake over the evidence as if it were not nearly as serious as we may believe, it also has a great deal of value.

Because Isabella was there.

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## **Petra X says**

This book, very short, very emotional, begs to be read in one sitting. Its the story of five sisters, a brother, their mother and father during WWII. The father, in the US, desperately seeking visas to bring his family to safety from Hungary receives them too late. The mother and youngest child are immediately murdered by the Nazis in the gas chambers and one sister dies later. But three sisters survive by their wits and one of them relates briefly the horror of that time in this incredibly powerful book. If you never read another book on this ultimate tale of man's inhumanity to man, then this one would give you enough of a view to understand the times and the horror.

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## **Bonnye Reed says**

GNAB I received a free electronic copy of this excellent memoir from Netgalley, Isabella Leitner, and Open Road Integrated Media In exchange for an honest review. Thank you, for sharing your work with me.

This was a very quick, extremely powerful, heartbreaking read. In carefully chosen words Isabella Leitner is able to bring your heart and mind into the emotional reality faced by this large Hungarian Jewish family as they experience brutal expulsion from their home, their city, their life, and the horrors of Auschwitz and several work camps as they are whittled down throughout the balance of the war. At war's end, they number only three. These sisters support of each other - their trust and dependance on one another is remarkable. Your heart will break when they begin to consider that letting go, giving up, would literally be a kindness to one another.

This is a holocaust memoir suitable for younger adult readers. Ms. Leitner's work reads like fragmented journal entries, and she is able to express the fear and horror of their situations without graphic details.  
Pub date June 14, 2016

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## **Mark says**

preliminary text.-

"You don't die of anything  
except death.  
Suffering doesn't kill you.  
Only death."

p. 16-

"...we are packed into the cattle cars. . . Cars with barred windows, with planks of wood on the bars, so that no air can enter or escape...75 to a car...no toilets...no doctors... no medication. ...no room to sit...no room to stand...no air to breathe.This is no way to die. It offends even death. Yet people are dying all around me.

"We squeeze my mother into a sitting position on the backpacks. Her face has an otherworldly look. She knows she will not live. But she wants us to live, desperately.

"Stay alive, my darlings--all six of you. Out there, when this is all over, a world is waiting for you to give it all I gave you. Despite what you see here--and you are all young and impressionable--believe me, there is humanity out there, there is dignity. I will not share it with you, but it's there. And when this is over, you must add to it because sometimes it is a little short, a little skimpy. With your lives, you can create other

lives and nourish them. You can nourish your children's souls and minds, teach them that man is capable of infinite glory. ...My body is nearly dead, but my vision is throbbing with life--even here....in some mysterious way, my love will overcome my death and will keep you alive. I love you."

This is incredible! Are there really people in the world that deny that the holocaust did occur? THE EVIDENCE IS OVERWHELMING. The images linger in one's memory. NEVER ON MY SHIFT, I SCREAM!

-p. 94- "I want to tell my mother that I kept her faith, that I lived because she -p. 95-wanted me to, that the strength she imbued me with is not for sale, that the god in man is worth living for, and I will make sure that I hand that down to those who come after me."

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### **abby says**

This memoir is short but powerful. Isabella Leitner survives Aushwitz and other concentration camps, along with several of her sisters. Each sister struggles as an individual, but by sticking together they conjure the strength to make it through their ordeal. Each one lives not for themselves, but for the others. It's the ultimate statement of the love of family.

One thing that really resonated with me is Leitner's anger. I think sometimes when a person has been through tragedy, there's too much pressure to forgive, to move on, to consider other perspectives. Don't stay bitter. No one wants to hear about *that*-- did you see what was on tv last week? But sometimes I think it's ok just to be angry and stay angry.

\* Thank you to both the publisher and netgalley for granting me access to this title

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### **Chris says**

Disclaimer: ARC via Netgalley

As I start to write this review, the Internet is somewhat imploding because of a comic book. No, the character didn't come out as guy, and no I don't really want to talk about because it is dumb. But then you sit and think, and you have to wonder if some people never read books like this one.

Today, you would think everyone knows about the Holocaust and that we pretty much don't have to educate people about it. And then you get smacked in the face by, to use polite langue, idiots. You have Holocaust Denials. You have idiots who know there was a Holocaust but think it was one the Jews were killing everyone. You have comparisons of people like Obama to Hitler. You just have to wonder about what people are learning about history that even in the modern world where information about the Holocaust is readily available in a wide variety of sources, why people are so filled with stupidity.

Leitner's memoir isn't so much a memoir in the traditional sense of the word. If you have read Charlotte Delbo's Auschwitz and After, Leitner's work is much like that memoir. It is more of conveying of memoir. While Leitner isn't as poetic as Delbo, her book is just as compelling. In part, this is because Delbo was imprisoned because her involvement with the Resistance, and Leitner was Jewish.



Leitner's memoir starts with the deportment from the Ghetto and follows her experiences during the war. The free form and very short chapters in which the story is told make it all the more compelling because there is a sense of pain that is viscerally felt by the reader. Leitner conveys more in simple words than other writers do. It is this aspect of the book that makes this volume essential reading. The sense of pain is even given more recent context in the afterword by Leitner's husband.

Maybe if this book was assigned more we would not have to deal with idiots.

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### **Marta Ávila says**

Nice book, but probably too introspective for my taste. Not very holocaust historic, just more into psychological considerations...

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### **Greta says**

The way this holocaust memoir is written is heartbreaking : in fragments and in short sentences. As if she struggled to revisit the past, her memories of being deported to Auschwitz as a young girl. A painful memoir of a ruined life.

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### **Karen says**

True story....

May 28th 1944

Isabel and her mother and sisters, in Hungary, are packing for their big journey, the next day is deportation to Auschwitz by train, just for being Jews.

On the first day in Auschwitz, the sisters are put in the "life" side line, their mother sent to burn..

Another despicable, unimaginable, horrendous account of the life in the camps, the girls were taken to several as they wasted away to nothing This one however has a better ending then most.

We get to see Isabel's life after she is free and her life in America, and how the emotional scars never heal.

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### **Eva Leger says**

This is a *very* slim book. I was surprised that this book isn't more well known than it is. I'd never heard of it until I did a search for holocaust books and happened to see it near the one I was searching for.

The story is a very quick one, I finished it in less than an hour last night. It's one of that you start and can't stop until the end.

Leitner's book starts with her leaving the ghetto and being transported to her first camp- Auschwitz. She leaves as a member of a 7 person family. She ends up a person in a 4 person family. (This is not including family out of the country, which her Father and several other extended family members were.) Some would say she's lucky she survived and that some of her sisters and one brother did as well and I suppose that's true. But there is no word for how *unlucky* it is to see your Mother being carted off to an oven. How does one survive that? Leitner mentions numerous times that were it not for her sisters she'd have given up early on-

her sisters kept her alive.

The story takes us through the few camps Isabella went through, some of what she went through there, some of her feelings at what happened to humanity during this time.

There is also a touching remembrance of a family vacation years later where a group of Germans sat down next to her and her family in a restaurant. The flashbacks were so utterly horrible for her that she was forced to leave while freaking out.

This type of book is especially hard for me to read because I'm half German. My Mother is from Germany and my Grandfathers fought against each other in the war. They fought *against* each other. And then became friends years later when their children married. I'm aware that what those people did is not a reflection on me but at the same time it's hard to hear certain things being said about "Germans". My Mother is a "German". *I'm a German*. Leitner didn't use the term 'Nazi's' in the book, but 'Germans'. It's one of those situations where I fully understand yet I don't understand at all.

I will keep reading the memoirs of Holocaust survivors- they wrote them for reasons and they deserve to be heard and their ordeals known around the world.

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