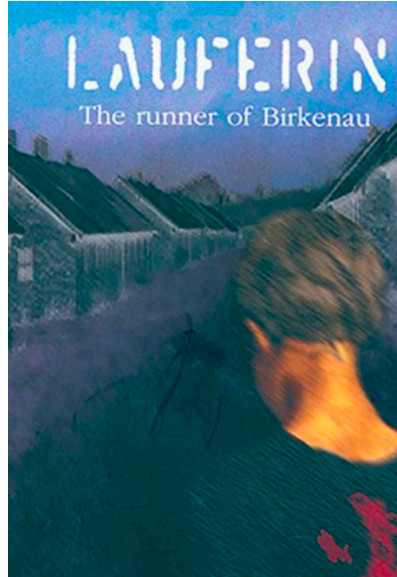


LEARNING THROUGH MEMOIR

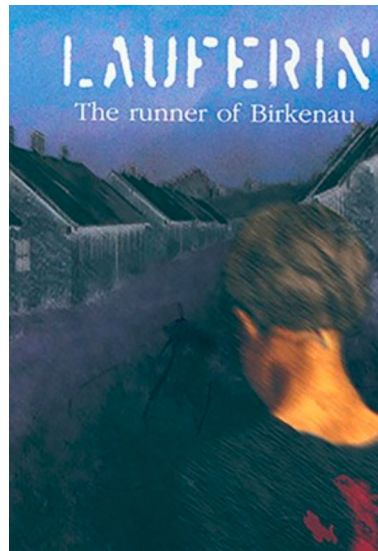
‘Lauferin: The Runner of Birkenau’ by Luisa Haberfeld



Lusia was born in 1931 in Lodz, Poland. In 1939 the Nazis marched into Lodz, terrified and robbed the Jews and imposed a curfew. Jews had to wear yellow stars. Lusia’s family escaped to Warsaw but was soon forced into the Warsaw Ghetto where they stayed until their arrest in 1943 during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The family was transported in cattle trains to Majdanek, where Lusia’s father Adas and little brother Rysio were murdered. Lusia and her mother Adela were transported to Auschwitz, where they were tattooed. Lusia found work as a messenger, or ‘runner’, in the camp and narrowly avoided selection for the gas chambers. With the Russians approaching, Lusia and her mother survived a death march to Bergen-Belson in Germany, their third and final camp. They were liberated by English soldiers on 15 April 1945. After the war, Lusia married Harry, another Holocaust survivor, and in 1950 they arrived in Melbourne to start a new life.

To watch Luisa’s testimony [click here](#).

Note: There is some potentially confronting content in the ‘deportation’ section on p32. This is not included as part of the recommended extract, but is on the same page. Teachers might opt to black this out.



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Theme: Pre-War Jewish Life

Context: Lusia describes her extended family, life in her home city of Lodz, religious festivals and school life.

Page numbers: p8 (“I realise now that I had a privileged childhood...”) to p10 (“...we also learnt Jewish history.”)

Approximate word count: 550

GLOSSARY

privileged: fortunate

Poles: when Lusia refers to Poles, she is referring to non-Jewish people from Poland to differentiate them from Jewish people; it should be noted that Jewish people in Poland were also Polish and identified themselves as such.

immediate family: Lusia’s parents and younger brother Rysio

paternal: related through the father

maternal: related through the mother

kosher: foods that comply with Jewish dietary laws

Seder: Passover meal that includes reading from religious texts, singing and other customs

Passover: important Jewish festival

pantomime: theatrical entertainment for children

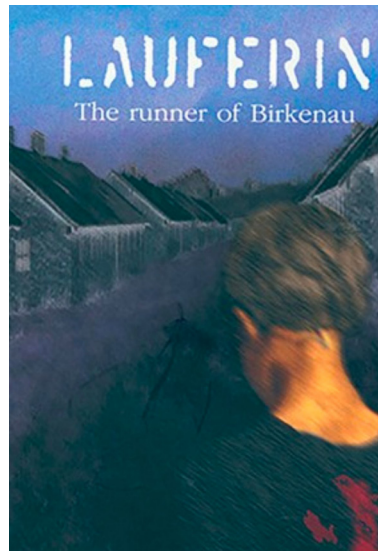
Sarah Bernhardt: popular French stage actress

balls: formal dances

terrace: large, flat area

patriots: people who love their country

mother tongue: first language



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Theme: War

Context: Luscia describes the fear of being bombed after the 1939 German invasion of Poland, which started World War Two. She recounts the German army marching into her home city of Lodz. She was about to turn eight.

Page numbers: p15 (My father was called up...) to p16 (...welcomed the invaders with flowers.)

Approximate word count: 300

GLOSSARY

called up: made to join

Tatus: Polish word for father

resistance: in this case, Poland’s attempt to defend itself against the German military

bombardment: heavy bombing

gas bombs: bombs that contain poison gas

Lodz: city in Poland

bunkers: underground shelters

cellars: rooms below ground

tenants: people living in the building

scene: picture

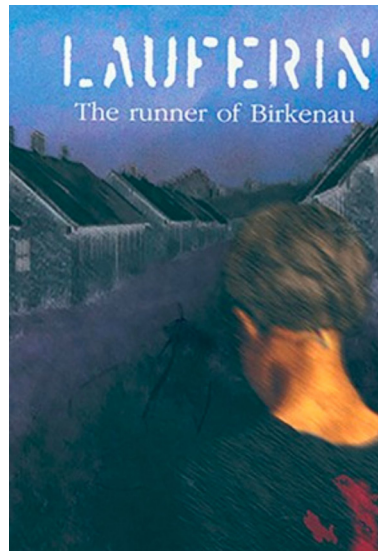
conquering: victorious

sinister: evil

foreboding; dread: intense fear

inhuman: lacking human qualities

threatening: scary



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Theme: Persecution

Context: Lusia describes the impact of the Nazi occupation on the Jewish population of Lodz, and how some people responded. She turned eight shortly after the Nazis invaded.

Page numbers: p16 (“The synagogue was burnt to the ground...”) to p17 (“...and working together!”)

Approximate word count: 380

GLOSSARY

synagogue: Jewish place of worship

tenants: people living in the building

cellar: room below ground

BBC news: Radio broadcasts from Great Britain, which was at war with Nazi Germany

curfew: regulation forcing people to stay inside at certain times, typically at night

imposed: enforced

Yellow Star of David: cloth badge featuring a Jewish symbol that people were forced to wear to identify them as Jewish

forbidden: banned

attic: room in a roof

fate: destiny

ration cards: card issued by a government to allow the holder to obtain food

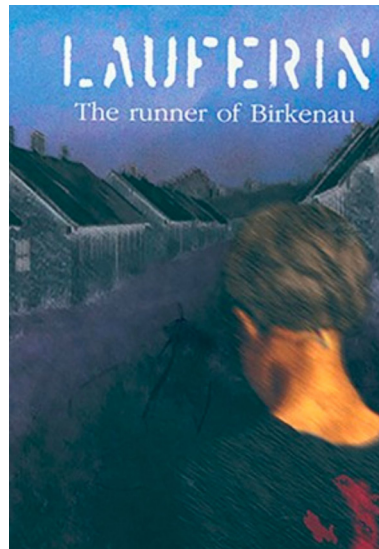
Leszek: non-Jewish boy who worked for Lusia’s family

porcelain: high quality china

our shop: Lusia’s family ran a shop selling women’s clothing

Joziek Wolak: non-Jewish man who was a friend of Lusia’s father

Pola: a non-Jewish woman who worked for Lusia’s family



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Theme: Ghettoisation

Context: In the winter of 1939-40, Lusia’s family fled Lodz for Warsaw, Poland’s capital city. Her parents were hoping to travel from Warsaw to Russia to escape the Nazis. Instead, the family was forced into the Warsaw Ghetto. Lusia describes the early days of the ghetto and how her family managed to survive. Lusia was eight when she started living in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Page numbers: p21 (“At first, in Warsaw, we lived among...”) to p23 (“That was the last time she went to Lodz.”)

Approximate word count: 520

GLOSSARY

Warsaw: Poland’s capital and biggest city

Poles: when Lusia refers to Poles, she is referring to non-Jewish people from Poland to differentiate them from Jewish people; it should be noted that Jewish people in Poland were also Polish and identified themselves as such.

herded: moved like animals

ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

Chulent: traditional Jewish dish

normalcy: state of being normal

liquidated: in this case, shut down

concentrated more densely: crammed in

Ogrodova 29: street name and number in Warsaw Ghetto

allotted: given

swollen: unnaturally expanded

slave labour: forced to work

allocation: amount

rationed: limited

ersatz: artificial version of a product

Lodz: city in Poland

fabric: cloth

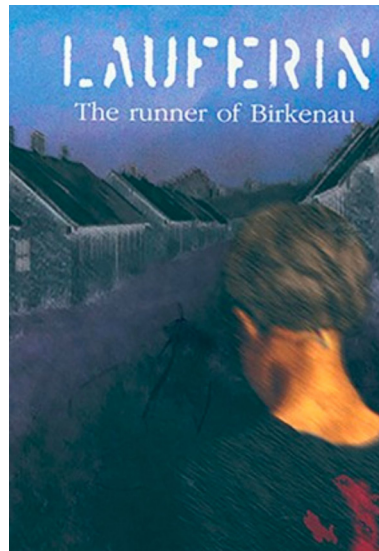
stock: unsold goods

livelihood: way to make a living

Aryan: Nazis falsely categorised people into a racial hierarchy, in which so-called ‘Aryans’ – non-Jewish people, preferably with blond hair and blue eyes – were considered a superior race

looked Jewish: Nazis falsely argued that there was a single ‘Jewish look’

Jude: German word for Jew



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Theme: Resistance

Context: Lusia describes hiding in the Warsaw Ghetto during the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and fleeing from the Nazis, who entered the ghetto in tanks and put down the uprising. She was 11 at the time.

Page numbers: p30 (“The ‘cleansing’ started. So did the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.”) to p31 (“...The whole world was on fire.”)

Approximate word count: 490

GLOSSARY

‘cleansing’: in this instance, Lusia is referring to the Nazi terminology of cleansing Warsaw of Jewish people; that is, deporting them to camps where they would be murdered or used for slave labour

Warsaw: capital of Poland

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: an armed rebellion by Jewish prisoners in the Warsaw Ghetto from 19 April 1943 to 16 May 1943

ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

Molotov cocktails: homemade explosive devices

Leszno 76: address in Warsaw Ghetto

bunker: underground hiding place

desperation: complete loss of hope

manhole: the small entrance to the cellar

Israel: historical homeland of Jewish people which became a nation state in 1948 after the Holocaust

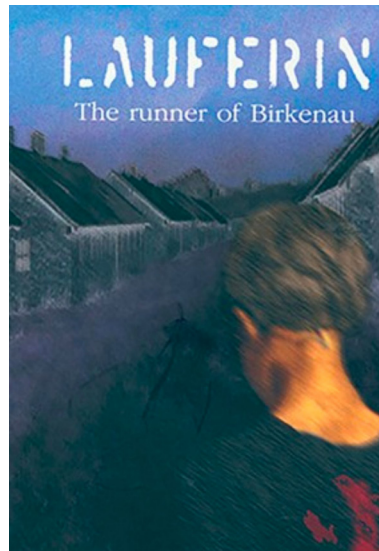
attics: rooms in the roofs of buildings

pillars: wood used as support for buildings

Uncle Yoziek, Hela, little Henry: relatives of Lusia

stripped: took

herded: moved like animals



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Theme: Deportation

Context: Lusia describes her 1943 deportation in a cattle wagon from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Polish city of Lublin, which was home to the Majdanek death and slave labour camp. She was 11 at the time.

Page numbers: p32 (“Their brutality was terrible...”) to p32 (“...and someone else gave us a little water.”) and p32 (“A last, the train arrived at Lublin.”) to p33 (“I love you and miss you so much – I always will.”)

Approximate word count: 265

GLOSSARY

brutality: cruelty

Umschlag Platz: German for ‘collection point’; holding areas next to railway stations where Jews from ghettos were forced to assemble for deportation to Nazi camps

Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Latvians: non-Jewish people from Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia, countries under Nazi control, who in this instance were collaborating with the Nazis

cubicles: small, separate areas

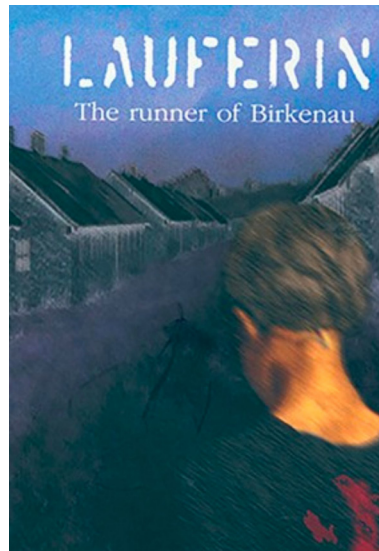
Rysio: Lusia’s younger brother

pacify: calm

Lublin: Polish city; the Majdanek death and slave labour camp was on the edge of the city

humanity: sense of being human

eternity: forever



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Theme: Courage

Context: Lusia describes how she miraculously survived the selection process at Majdanek, saving her from being murdered in the gas chambers. She was 11 at the time.

Page numbers: p36 (“They lined us up five abreast...”) to p38 (“It was a miracle.”)

Approximate word count: 560

GLOSSARY

five abreast: side by side (in rows of five)

frantic: distraught with fear

traumatized: deeply distressed in a way that causes lasting emotional pain

barracks: living spaces for prisoners

selection: process of selecting certain prisoners, in this case those to be murdered in the gas chambers

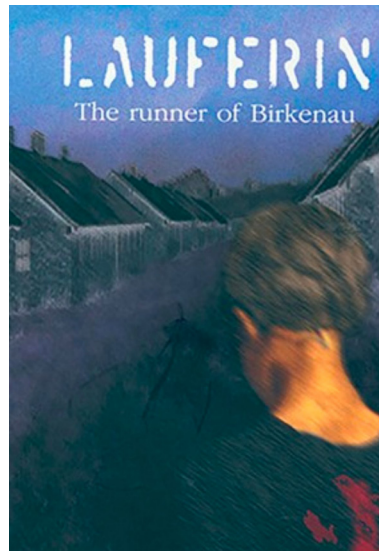
condemned: those who were to be murdered

enclosure: closed off area

sauna: steam room

Czech: language spoken in Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia: country in central Europe (now divided into Czech Republic and Slovakia)



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Theme: Camps

Context: Lusia describes her arrival at Auschwitz in 1943, including being tattooed on arrival and procuring medicine for her mother, who had fallen sick. She was 11 at the time.

Page numbers: p44 (“What followed was sheer hell.”) to p46 (“We used to call it protekczja.”)

Approximate word count: 610

GLOSSARY

petrified: so scared one is unable to move

branded: permanently marked

barracks: living space for prisoners

Children’s Block: section in Auschwitz where children were held

gassed: murdered in gas chambers

malaria: life-threatening disease spread by mosquitoes

Auschwitz: Nazi camp where Jews were murdered in gas chambers or used for slave labour

devastated: overwhelming shock or grief

feverish: displaying signs of fever

quinine: medication used to treat malaria

gas chambers: airtight rooms that were filled with poisonous gas to kill people

crematorium: furnace where bodies of murdered people were burned

Sonder Kommando: unit of Jewish prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria

Jewish transports: trains carrying Jewish prisoners to the camps

Moshe: Sonder Kommando who helped Lusia

Grondo: city in Belarus in eastern Europe

Chaim Kaminski: capo, or head, of the Sonder Kommando unit in Auschwitz

capo (kapo): prisoner assigned tasks by the Nazis in exchange for special favours

Blokova: female prisoner in charge of a group (‘block’) of prisoners

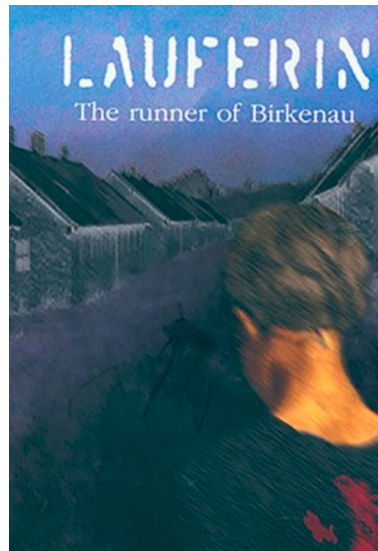
protekczja: Polish for ‘protection’

Student Questions

On the lines: Identify the substance Chaim Kaminski smuggled to Lusia to save her mother's life.

Between the lines: Explain why members of the Sonder Kommando might have had access to items that were unavailable to other prisoners, and why Chaim Kaminski decided to 'protect' Lusia and her mother.

Beyond the lines: Use the extract to analyse the ways in which prisoners in Auschwitz were dehumanised.



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Theme: Murder

Context: Lusia describes a selection conducted at Auschwitz by the infamous Dr Mengele, and how she managed to avoid the gas chambers thanks to the intervention of Chaim Kaminski (a senior Jewish prisoner) and Schmitka (a non-Jewish prisoner in charge of the Clothing Depot, for whom Lusia worked as a messenger or ‘runner’).

Page numbers: p50 (“As fate would have it...”) to p52 (“...packing the clothing of the camp in bundles of twenty-five.”)

Approximate word count: 550

GLOSSARY

selection: process of selecting certain prisoners, in this case those to be murdered in the gas chambers

infamous: famous for something bad

Dr Mengele: German SS officer and doctor who performed inhumane and often deadly experiments on prisoners and often conducted selections

sadist: person who gets pleasure from inflicting pain

Chaim Kaminski: a Jewish prisoner selected by the Nazis to run the Sonder Kommando unit, which was forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria in Auschwitz

Schmitka: Frau Schmidt, a non-Jewish political prisoner who ran the Clothing Depot in Auschwitz and used Lusia as a messenger girl, thus helping her avoid selection for the gas chambers

gas chambers: airtight rooms that were filled with poisonous gas to kill people

crematoria: furnaces where bodies of murdered people were burned

Camp Commandant: Nazi officer in overall charge of the camp

Strangste Block Spere: lockdown of the prisoner block with nobody allowed to leave the building

Forth-eight thousand: Lusia was number 48,703, which was tattooed on her arm

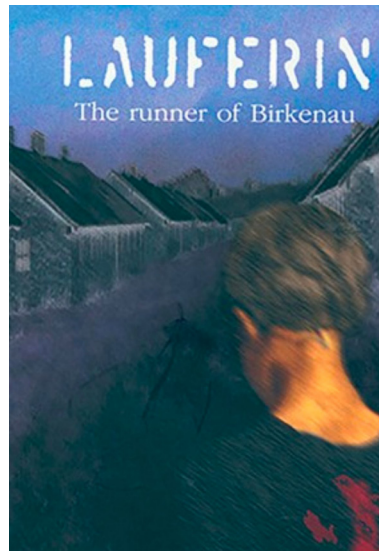
malaria: life-threatening disease spread by mosquitoes

barracks: large buildings that house people

cursed: damned; ill-fated

lorries: trucks

stench: strong and unpleasant smell



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Theme: Liberation

Context: In early 1945, with the Russian army closing in on Auschwitz, the Nazis forced Lusia by foot and train to Bergen Belsen, a Nazi concentration camp in Germany. Lusia describes her liberation by the British Army three months after arriving at her third and final camp. She was 13 at the time.

Page numbers: p64 (“During the three months that my mother and I...”) to p66 (“...think of those things forever.”)

Approximate word count: 540

GLOSSARY

Bergen-Belsen: Nazi concentration camp in Germany

Funktionshäftlinge: Jewish prisoners given special tasks in exchange for favours

dynamite: explosive

markings: labelling; symbols

Lager Führer Kramer: Senior Nazi officer Joseph Kramer

liberation: freedom

English: soldiers from England (part of Great Britain), who were fighting Nazi Germany

atrocities: cruel acts

British army: soldiers from Great Britain, who were fighting Nazi Germany

German prisoners-of-war: German soldiers who had been captured by the British and other Allies during their defeat of Nazi Germany

derived: gained

grim: bleak; gloomy

satisfaction: fulfilment of one’s wishes

dysentery: gastrointestinal disease, including diarrhoea and vomiting

Warsaw Ghetto: the biggest ghetto in Poland, where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

barracks: large buildings that house people

mined: planted with explosives

evidence: information that could be used in court

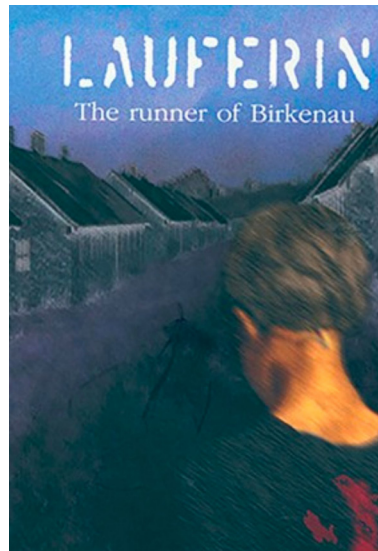
enterprising: clever; resourceful

Student Questions

On the lines: When was Lusia liberated and how old was she?

Between the lines: Explain why so many Jewish women died after liberation, despite the efforts of the British Army?

Beyond the lines: Lusia talks of a “grim satisfaction” at seeing German prisoners forced to bury bodies from the camp. Analyse this phrase and why liberation was a time of mixed emotions for those who survive the Holocaust. Why might the discovery of the watches have added to these feelings?



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Theme: Return to Life

Context: After liberation, Lusia lived for a period on a communal farm in Germany with other young Holocaust survivors. Her mother Adela lived in the nearby German city of Konstanz. Lusia describes a visit from her mother to ask permission from her daughter to re-marry. They had last seen her father Adas – Adela’s first husband – at the railway station near Majdanek death camp on 8 May 1943.

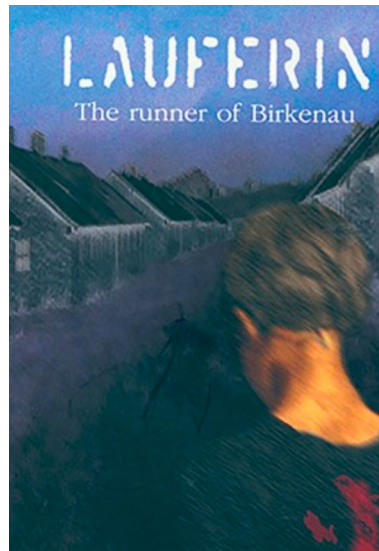
Page numbers: p77 (“While I was on the kibbutz...”) to p78 (“...she and Abram were a very close couple.”)

Approximate word count: 300

GLOSSARY

kibbutz: a communal farm; Lusia lived on a kibbutz with other young people in Germany for a period after liberation and before coming to Australia

Konstanz: city in Germany
sparingly: a little at a time
shattered: destroyed
betraying: being disloyal to



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Theme: Legacy and Life Lessons

Context: Lusia reflects on her life, experiences and legacy for the future.

Page numbers: p101 (“I have never been back to Europe...”) to p102 (“It is to the families Hasman and Haberfeld that I dedicate this book.”)

Approximate word count: 390

GLOSSARY

bitter: feelings of anger, hurt or resentment

burden: heavy psychological load

Harry: Lusia’s husband, also a Holocaust survivor

Abram: Lusia’s father-in-law

traumatized: deeply distressed in a way that causes lasting emotional pain

gas chambers: airtight rooms that were filled with poisonous gas to kill people

Auschwitz: Nazi camp where Jews were murdered in gas chambers or used for slave labour

alsation: German Shepherd dog, often used by Nazis to hunt or control Jewish people

death march: forced march of prisoners in which many were shot or died

shorn: shaved

barracks: living space for prisoners

humiliation: embarrassment; shame

concentration camp: camps with prisoners concentrated in a small area

over-protective: overly careful or cautious

Mike and Les: Lusia’s sons

stress and anxiety: fear; dread; uneasiness

Hitler: Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party and dictator of Germany

Melbourne Holocaust Museum: largest institution in Australia dedicated solely to Holocaust education, research and remembrance

tolerance: willingness to accept opinions or behaviour one disagrees with

generations: people born at roughly the same time

racial hatred: hating people because of their background

Elsternwick: suburb of Melbourne

memoir: personal account of one’s life

Rysio: Lusia’s younger brother; Rysio and Lusia’s father were murdered by the Nazis in 1943

