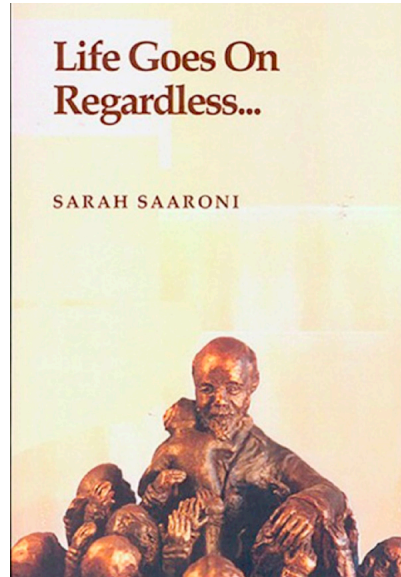


LEARNING THROUGH MEMOIR

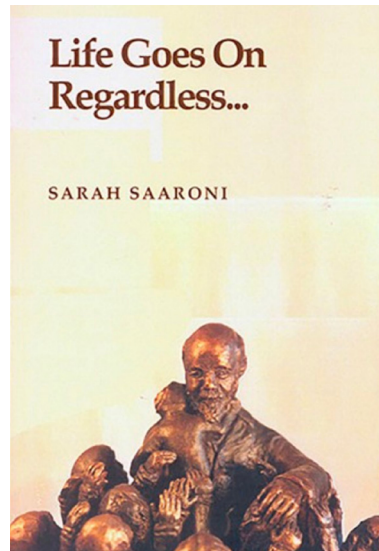
‘Life Goes on Regardless’ by Sarah Saaroni



Sarah was born in the Polish city of Lublin in 1926. Soon after the Nazi invasion, she and her family were forced to live in the Lublin Ghetto. They narrowly avoided deportation to a death camp and went into hiding. Sarah’s parents eventually made the decision to send Sarah into Germany to work as a slave labourer under a false identity as a Polish Christian girl. Despite several close calls, including being interrogated by the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police), Sarah was able to successfully ‘hide in plain sight’ until her liberation by the Russians in 1945. Her parents and the vast majority of her extended family were murdered in the Holocaust. In 1953, Sarah arrived in Australia, where she raised a family and became a celebrated sculptor. She received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2015.

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

Note: There is some potentially confronting content in the ‘liberation’ section on p70. 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: Sarah describes aspects of her life in the Polish city of Lublin before World War Two, including being refused entry into High School and other instances of antisemitism.

Page numbers: p1 ("In June 1939...") to p2 (...I needed to know") and p2 ("In fact, I remember...") to p3 ("... my friends were mainly Poles.")

Approximate word count: 420

GLOSSARY

seldom: rarely

Fishman: a common Jewish name

persecuted: treated unfairly

anti-Semitism [antisemitism]: hatred of Jewish people

pogroms: violent attacks on Jewish people

aspirations: hopes; ambitions

recollections: memories

grasped: understood

persecuted: discriminated against in a hostile manner

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

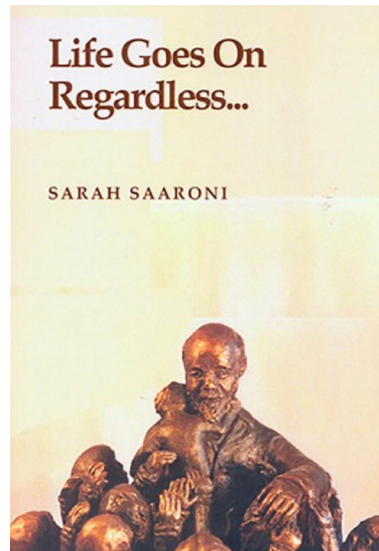
Jewish quarter: part of the city where many Jewish people lived

assimilated Jews: Jews who lived in the same way as non-Jewish people

progressive: modern

our language was Polish: most Jewish people in Poland spoke Yiddish, not Polish, as their main language

public school: school attended by Jewish and non-Jewish children, as opposed to a school for children from a particular background, such as a Jewish school



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Theme: War

Context: Sarah describes the lead-up to Germany’s invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, which started World War Two, the bombing raids in the first weeks of the war, and the arrival of thousands of German soldiers in her hometown of Lublin. She was 13 at the time.

Page numbers: p4 (“I became engrossed...”) to p6 (“...just glad that the bombing was over.”)

Approximate word count: 520

GLOSSARY

engrossed: deeply interested

patriotic: being devoted to or loving one’s country

artillery: heavy weapons

ventured out: to go out bravely

unnatural: strange; abnormal

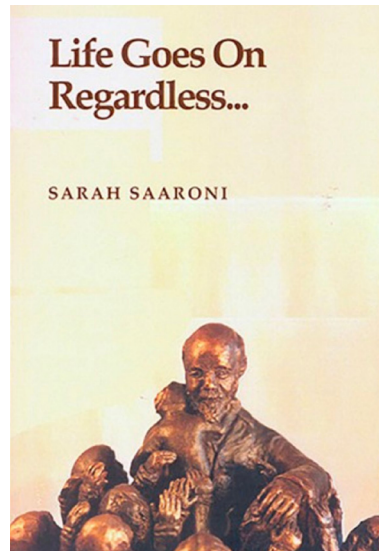
havoc: chaos

gaping: wide

sinister: evil

trembled: shook with fear

independence: free from outside control



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Theme: Persecution

Context: Sarah describes the early days of the Nazi occupation of Lublin. This includes the temporary round-up of all men and the confiscation of the family’s business after a non-Jewish Polish woman identified them as Jews to the Germans.

Page numbers: p6 (“For hours and hours...”) to p7 (“...compensated after the War.”)

Approximate word count: 320

GLOSSARY

petrified: extremely frightened

Zosia: Sarah’s older sister

herded: crammed in like animals

barbed wire: wire with sharp spikes

accumulating: collecting

accompany: go with

spirit: life force; morale

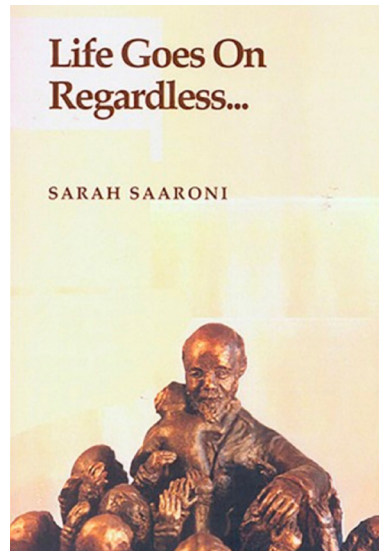
bewilderment: confusion

stock: goods or merchandise in a shop

confiscated: taken away

receipt: written record for the exchange of goods

compensated: paid goods or money to make up for a loss



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Theme: Ghettoisation

Context: Sarah describes her family being forced to leave their home and move into the Lublin Ghetto, as well as aspects of life in the ghetto.

Page numbers: p9 (“One morning there was again ...”) to p9 (“...that was allotted to the Jews.”) and p9 (“Conditions inside the Ghetto...”) to p10 (“...end of my formal education.”)

Approximate word count: 330

GLOSSARY

ransacked: damaged; things stolen

salvage: save

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

allotted: set aside for

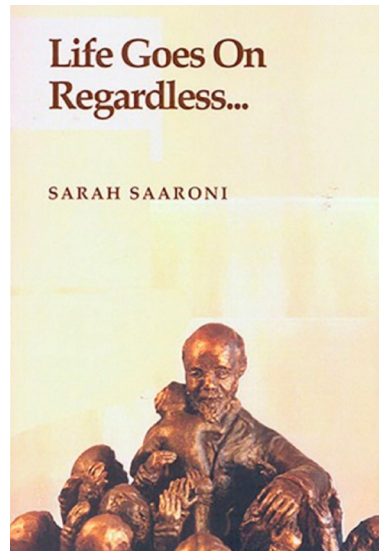
appalling: dreadful

cramped: crowded

listlessly: lacking energy

university graduate: someone who has a university degree

regrettably: unfortunately



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Theme: Deportation

Context: Sarah describes the traumatic process of deportation from the Lublin Ghetto to death and slave labour camps. She describes how her family narrowly avoided being sent to a camp, their decision to separate and hide, and her reunion with her parents.

Page numbers: p10 ("One morning, my father...") to p11 ("...still more people were coming and coming.") and p12 ("All day long we sat there...") to p13 ("...Zosia's fur coat that was miles too big for me.")

Approximate word count: 520

GLOSSARY

speculations: forming a theory without firm evidence

morale: spirits; mood

herded: crammed in like animals

without discrimination: for no reason

embracing: hugging

brutality: cruel violence

Plac Grodzki: a public square in Lublin

a group was selected and taken away: people selected to be deported to one of the camps

cattle trains: trains meant to carry animals, but which were used by the Nazis to transport Jewish people

Polish family: when Sarah refers to 'Polish' people, she is referring to non-Jewish people to

differentiate them from Jewish people; it should be noted that Jewish people in Poland were also Polish and identified themselves as such

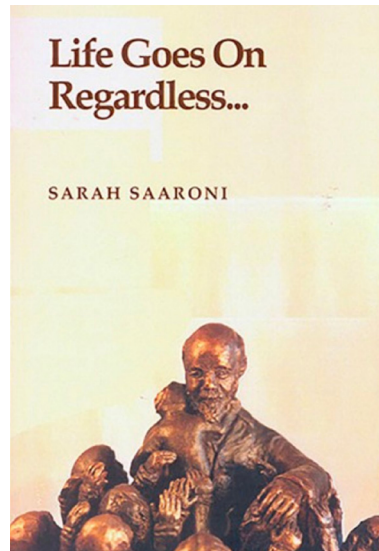
ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

the action: Sarah is referring to more round-ups of Jewish people for deportation

deportation: process of being transported by force to another place, in this case to a death or slave labour camp

overwhelming: very strong

Zosia: Sarah's older sister



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Theme: Evading Capture

Context: Sarah and her family spent a period hiding in various places in and around Lublin. Eventually, they were forced to return to the Lublin Ghetto. She describes her parents' decision to send her into Germany where she would hide 'in plain sight' as a Christian Polish girl and work as a slave labourer. Sarah had just turned 16 when she was sent to Germany, never to see her parents or most of her extended family again.

Page numbers: p21 ("We managed to hide...") to p22 (...deportation to Germany were assembled.") and p23 ("I heard all of this...") to p23 (...never see them again.")

Approximate word count: 530

GLOSSARY

harbouring: hiding

severe: harsh

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

Polish girl: when Sarah refers to 'Polish' people, she is referring to non-Jewish people to differentiate them from Jewish people; in this case, she would be hiding in Germany as a Christian Polish girl

quota: minimum number

forced labour: slave labour

maltreated: treated violently

bypass: avoid

seized: taken violently against someone's wishes

assembly camp: temporary camp

connections: powerful friends

spared: saved

deportation: transported by force

united: back together

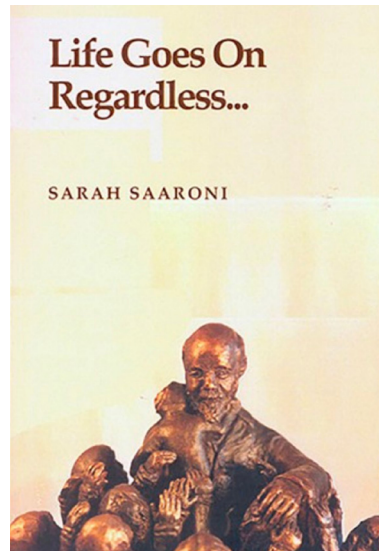
identification papers: documents to prove who you were; these were compulsory

privilege: special treatment

synagogue: Jewish place of worship

orthodox school: school for traditional, religious Jewish children

trance: dazed state



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Theme: Resistance

Context: Sarah describes collecting a false birth certificate and registering at the temporary assembly camp for non-Jewish Polish women who would be going to Germany as slave labourers. She recalls waking a Jewish woman who was risking her life by talking Yiddish in her sleep. She was 16 at the time.

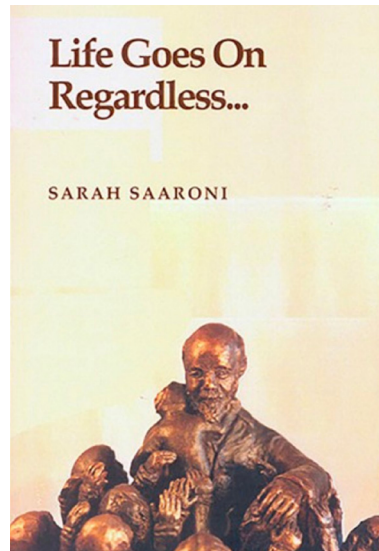
Page numbers: p26 ("In the morning...") to p27 ("...give my secret away.")

Approximate word count: 320

GLOSSARY

document: in this case, a birth certificate
camp: temporary camp in Lublin for non-Jewish people going to Germany to work as slave labourers
register: report to officials
birth certificate: official record of someone's identity at birth
memorise: remember
compulsory: required by law

barrack: building where people were housed
cramped: crowded
bunks: beds on top of one another
frantically: desperately
Yiddish: language used by many Jewish people in central and eastern Europe, including Poland; Sarah's family, by contrast, spoke Polish, which was an advantage when trying to pretend not to be Jewish



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Theme: Hiding

Context: Sarah describes aspects of life while 'hiding in plain sight' as a Christian Polish girl while working as a slave labourer at factory making and bottling sauce in Germany. She was 16 when she started working in Germany under the false name Lidia Wornik.

Page numbers: p29 ("Food was very bad...") to p31 ("...war and its consequences.")

Approximate word count: 420

GLOSSARY

bottles and jars: Sarah and the other 'Polish' women were working at a sauce factory

recognised: identified

familiar: recognisable

Ukrainian village: a village in Ukraine, near Poland

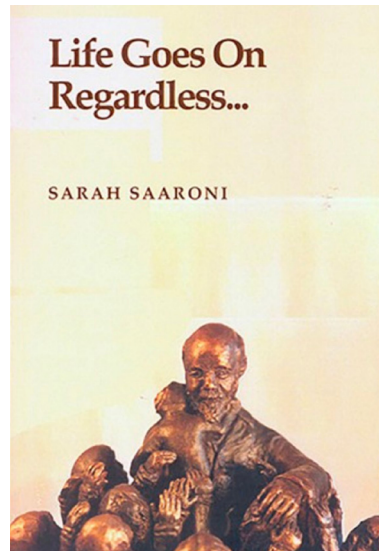
Lublin: Polish city where Sarah lived

Yiddish: language spoken by most Polish Jews; Sarah, on the other hand, spoke Polish

Zakrzowek: village where Sarah's family lived for a short time after leaving the Lublin Ghetto

forbidden: not allowed

consequences: effects; impact



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Theme: Courage

Context: Sarah describes being interrogated by the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, under suspicion of being Jewish and using false identification papers. She had been arrested in the German countryside, having fled the German city of Hamburg when it was bombed by the Allies. She had apparently been betrayed by a non-Jewish 'friend' in Poland, to whom she had sent a postcard for Easter.

Page numbers: p46 ("I was taken into the room...") to p48 ("...and I threw it down a drain.")

Approximate word count: 470

GLOSSARY

civilian: non-military

Lidia Wornik: Sarah's false name

denying: insisting an accusation is false

SF: initials for Sarah Fishman, Sarah's real name

Gestapo: Nazi secret police

Marcin Nastaj: non-Jewish Polish friend of Sarah; Sarah had sent him a postcard for Easter, but this was used as evidence she was hiding under a false identity

Easter: Christian religious festival

Zakrzówek: town near Lublin

deceiving: tricking

recognised: identified

Lublin: Polish city where Sarah's family lived

Kennkarte: identification documents issued by German authorities; in Sarah's case, they contained false information

confiscated: taken away

Hamburg: German city where Sarah worked after arriving in Germany

secure: safe

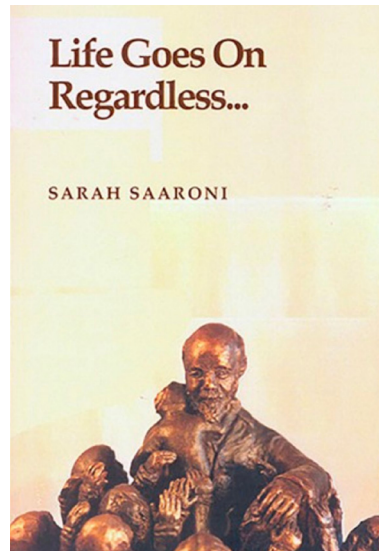
special permit: documents giving permission

Student Questions

On the lines: Identify the false name that Sarah was living under in Germany.

Between the lines: Explain why Sarah threw her ring down a drain as soon as she left the Gestapo headquarters. How did it threaten her life?

Beyond the lines: Analyse the ways in which Sarah demonstrated courage during her interrogation by the Gestapo. What does the extract suggest about her personality and character strengths?



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Theme: Liberation

Context: Sarah describes her liberation by the Russian army in the German town of Grossröhrsdorf. Sarah had fled to the town after escaping from the Nazis, who had attempted to deport her to Majdanek, a death and slave labour camp near her home city of Lublin in Poland. In Grossröhrsdorf, Sarah was taken in by a German family, the Freidenbergs, and worked at their family bakery. She recounts joining a group of Poles attempting to return home after war. She was 18 at the time of her liberation.

Page numbers: p70 ("Soon after this...") to p70 ("...on their knees.") and p70 ("I tried to help...") to p71 ("...day and night.")

Approximate word count: 450

GLOSSARY

liberated: freed

Russians: soldiers from Russia who were fighting against Nazi Germany

resistance: fighting back

Freidenbergs: German family who took Sarah in to work at their bakery after she escaped the Gestapo

refuge: safe place

relieve: take from

maltreated: treated cruelly

withdraw: leave

Unit: group of soldiers

isolated: on its own

main body: rest of the soldiers

consequences: effects; impact

grim: extremely serious

Grossröhrsdorf: German town where Sarah worked at the Freidenberg's bakery

material possessions: in this instance, valuables

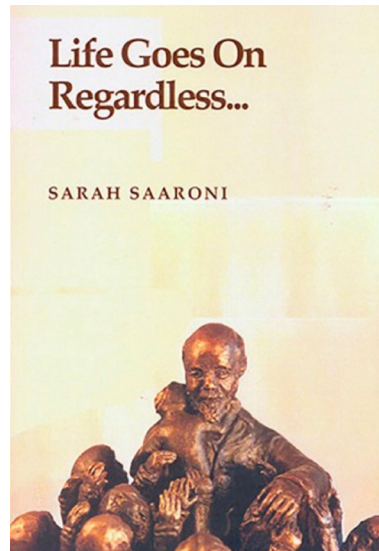
military supply column: people who provide soldiers, in this case Russians, with supplies and services, such as food, ammunition and medical care

army detachment: soldiers

Görlitz: German town

in earnest: heavy fighting

sporadically: randomly



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Theme: Return to Life

Context: Sarah describes returning to her home city of Lublin after the Holocaust. She recounts her interactions with two non-Jewish people. The first was a neighbour who was given many of the Fishman family's valuable items to look after when they were forced into the Lublin Ghetto. The second was the man who took over the Fishman family's clothes shop when it was confiscated because Jews were not allowed to own businesses. Sarah also describes her joy at seeing her brother Julek's name on a list of Jewish people who survived.

Page numbers: p79 ("I left the station...") to p80 ("...he was back and I had his address.")

Approximate word count: 450

GLOSSARY

roots: origins; where Sarah came from

peculiar and alien: like a stranger

Kazia: a woman who used to work for Sarah's family

refuge: a safe place

stammeringly: in a stuttering or nervous manner

china: crockery, quality plates, bowls, etc

Dresden figurines: high quality porcelain figures made in Dresden, Germany

receipt: a written record for the exchange of goods

merchandise: items for sale

garments: clothes

agitated: troubled; nervous

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

Relief Society: group providing help to surviving Jewish people

registered: recorded their details on an official list

disillusioned: extremely disappointed

automatically: without thinking

Aaron and Esther: Sarah's father and mother, both of whom were murdered in the Holocaust

Julek: Sarah's brother, one of her few surviving relatives after the Holocaust

