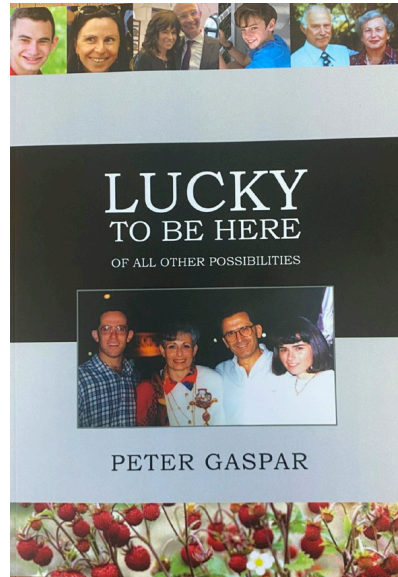
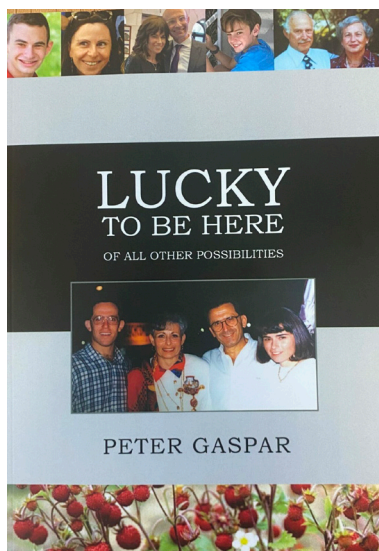


LEARNING THROUGH MEMOIR

‘Lucky To Be Here’ by Peter Gaspar



Peter Gaspar was born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia in 1937. When he was four, Bratislava was occupied by the Nazis. In 1942, Peter was expelled from school because he was Jewish. In fear for their lives, Peter and his parents went into hiding, perilously moving from place to place, including a grave-sized dugout for several days during the winter of 1944. When Peter became ill, his parents, in desperation, decided to turn themselves in. Separated from his father, Peter and his mother were deported to Terezin, a Nazi transit camp. They were imprisoned for five months until their liberation on 8 May 1945. Peter's father also survived, although most of his extended family was murdered. Of the thousands of children interned at Terezín, Peter was one of very few who survived. Peter and his parents arrived in Australia in 1949. Peter eventually married and started a family of his own in Australia.



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Theme: Pre-War Jewish Life

Context: Peter describes the relationships and interactions he and his parents had with their Jewish and non-Jewish friends in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, before World War Two.

Page numbers: p21 (“My parents had a wide circle of friends...”) to p23 (“...be alone in the street.”)

Approximate word count: 400

GLOSSARY

circle: group (in this instance)

assimilated Jews: Jewish people who were integrated into wider society

Christian: adherents of the Christian religion

bridge: card game

colleagues: workmates

professionals: people with qualifications working in prestigious jobs

committed: dedicated

Communists: people who supported a political and economic system in which all property is owned by the state and, in theory, distributed equally, creating a classless society

converted: changed religion

double jeopardy: two types of danger

‘on paper’: for appearances only; not really

withhold: keep secret

lest: in fear of

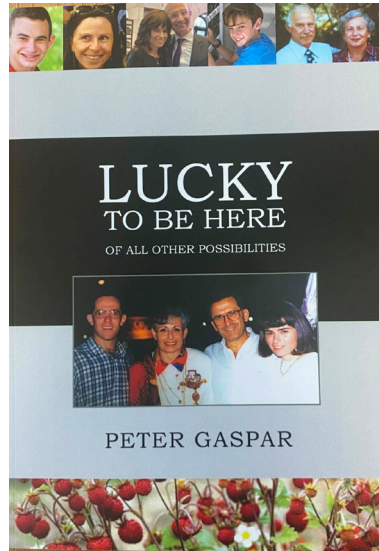
empty lots: vacant pieces of land

supplementing: adding to

meagre: in short supply

rations: provisions; in this case, food

charred: blackened



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Theme: Nazi Occupation

Context: Slovakia was invaded by Nazi Germany in 1939 and started introducing restrictions and policies that persecuted Slovak Jews. Peter describes the impacts these restrictions and policies had on him and his parents. Peter was one year old at the time.

Page numbers: p23 (“In 1938 the Nazi Party...”) to p24 (“...under Hitler’s control.”)

Approximate word count: 250

GLOSSARY

Nazi Party: German political party headed by Adolf Hitler

Monsignor: title for senior members of the Catholic Church

Jozef Tiso: political leader of Slovakia

fervent: passionate

nationalist: someone who vigorously supports their own country, especially to the detriment of other countries

puppet state: a government that appears to be independent but is actually controlled by another country

confiscated: taken away

professions: prestigious jobs

anti-semitism: hatred of Jewish people

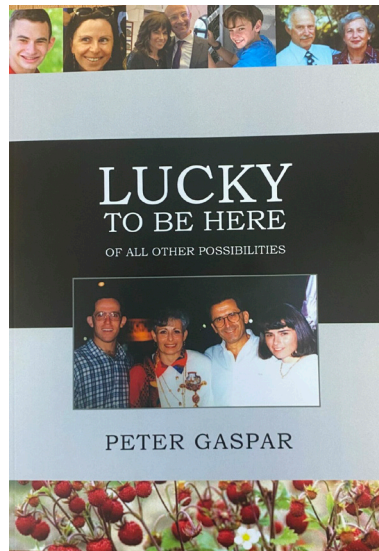
yellow star: cloth badge featuring the Jewish Star of David symbol that people were forced to wear to identify them as Jewish

garment: piece of clothing

pension contributions: payments made by an employee into a fund that they get back upon retirement

manpower: workers

conscripted: forced to join



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Theme: Persecution

Context: Peter describes the persecution of Jewish people in Slovakia, and the impact it had on him, his family, and the broader Jewish community in Bratislava.

Page numbers: p24 (“Around that time Dad...”) to p25 (“... lucky to have escaped arrest at that time.”)

Approximate word count: 75

GLOSSARY

conscripted: forced

regiment: a section of an army

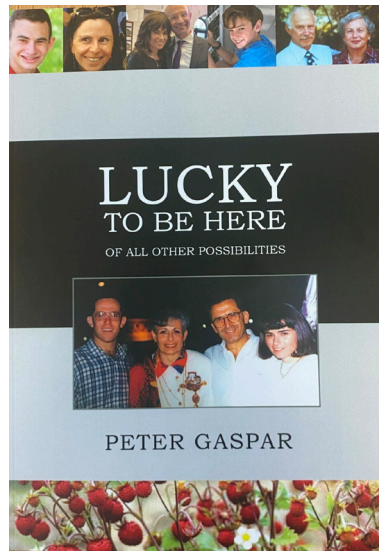
manual labour: physical work done by hand

Orthodox: traditional, religious Jews who sometimes wore distinctive clothing

transported: in this case, sent by train

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

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



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Theme: Hiding

Context: Peter describes hiding in a wide variety of places in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.

Page numbers: p27 (“That was when...”) to p29 (“...could eat something.”)

Approximate word count: 350

GLOSSARY

Christian: adherents of the Christian religion

Jan Kraus: non-Jewish friend who helped find hiding places for Peter and his parents

Frau: title or form of address for a German-speaking woman

implored: begged

hosts: in this instance, those hiding Jewish people

seldom: rarely

cellars: rooms below ground

cavities: empty spaces

orchards: land containing fruit trees

Danube: river that runs through Bratislava

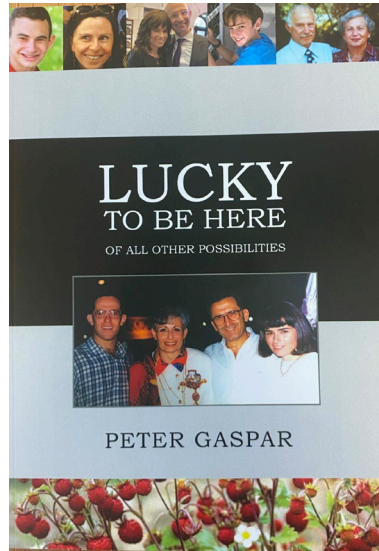
abandoned: empty

scarce: hard to get

ration cards: official documents which were the only way of legally obtaining food

‘illegal’: Because they were Jewish, Peter and his family were outside the law and had no rights

limited: small



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Theme: Courage

Context: Peter and his family went into hiding in Bratislava. In 1944, when that became too dangerous, they moved to the countryside, where they hid in various locations. One of these was the village home of a non-Jewish couple, Mr and Mrs Slezak. Peter describes being in their home when suddenly Nazis arrived. Peter turned seven that year.

Page numbers: p34 (“One day I was in the kitchen...”) to p34 (“... Lucky!”)

Approximate word count: 105

GLOSSARY

Mrs Slezak: non-Jewish woman who was helping hide Peter

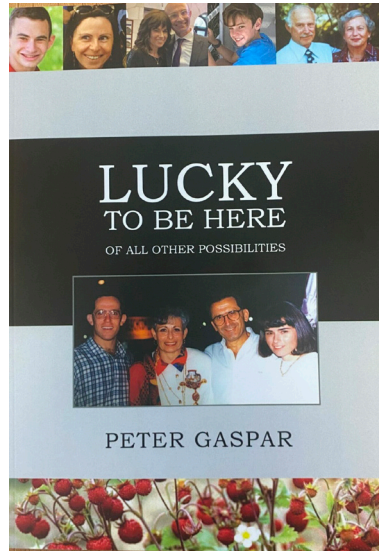
officers: senior members of the military

schnapps: an alcoholic drink

Notar: Mr Slezak; the name is a title from his job as a senior official in the village

ushered: led

pretext: reason; excuse



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Theme: Resistance

Context: Peter and his family were hiding in the farmhouse of Janko and Marienka Brinza. At some point it became too dangerous from them to hide within the farmhouse. Peter describes the challenges he and his parents faced while hiding in a hole in the ground during winter. He was seven at the time.

Page numbers: p35 (“By mid-December...”) to p35 (“...asked to be arrested.”)

Approximate word count: 200

GLOSSARY

concealed: hidden

Janko: Janko Brinza, a non-Jewish farmer who was helping hide Peter and his parents

Marienka: Marienka Brinza, a non-Jewish farmer who was helping hide Peter and his parents

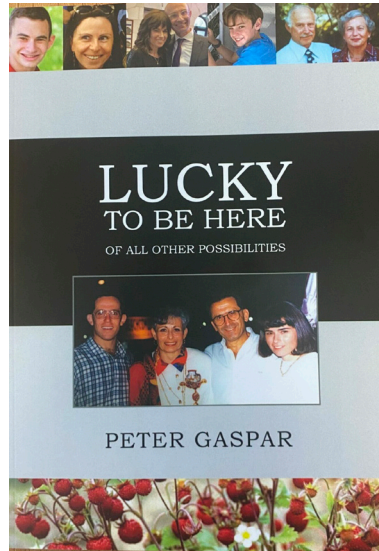
fever: high temperature

obtaining: getting

Vel’ky Grob: a nearby village

Cataj: the village nearest the Brinza’s farmhouse

identified ourselves: told someone who they were



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Theme: Deportation

Context: Peter describes how he and his mother were deported to Terezin concentration camp in 1944 after they had handed themselves in to police to be arrested. Peter was seven at the time.

Page numbers: p37 (“On 23 December 1944...”) to p38 (“... another lucky break.”)

Approximate word count: 260

GLOSSARY

cattle wagons: train carriages designed to carry cattle, but used during the Holocaust to transport Jewish people

destination: where they were going

nursed: breastfed

vents: small openings

waste: used as a toilet

shunting: being pushed or pulled

coupled; uncoupled: connected; disconnected

Sered: concentration camp in Slovakia

in transit: on the move

duration: length of time

Terezin: transit camp where Jewish people were imprisoned before being deported to death or slave labour camps

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

commanding officer: senior military person in charge

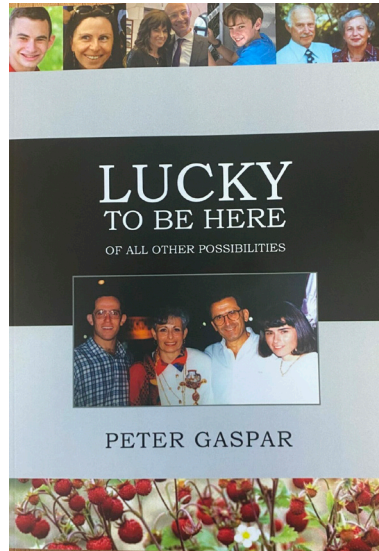
ceased: stopped

full to capacity: could not take any more people

dismantle: take down

extermination facilities: buildings and equipment used to murder Jews, such as gas chambers and crematoria for burning bodies

evidence: information that could be used against the Nazis



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Theme: Camps

Context: Peter describes life in Terezin transit camp, including receiving a letter from his father. He was seven at the time.

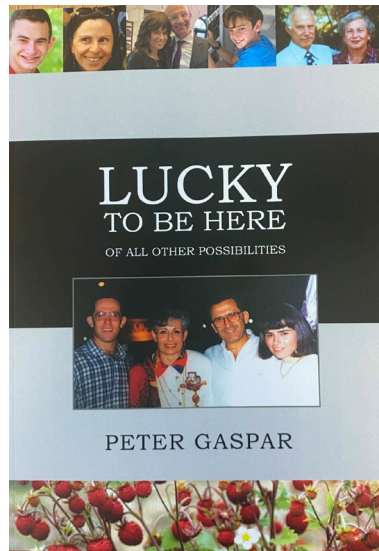
Page numbers: p41 (“I was put...”) to p43 (“...this letter to her.”)

Approximate word count: 500

GLOSSARY

dormitories: large rooms for group sleeping
three-tier bunks: three levels of beds, one on top of the other
rations: allotment of food
nourishing: health-giving
fashioned: made
cobbled: made of stones
Dresden barracks: name of a workshop area within Terezin where Peter’s mother performed slave labour
Sered: concentration camp in Slovakia

Oranienburg: German town where Peter’s father was forced to work as a slave labourer
Heinkel aircraft factory: workshop where Peter’s father worked as a slave labourer for the German air force
locksmith: person who makes and repairs locks
reunited: brought back together
Bratislava: capital of Slovakia, Peter’s hometown
permitted: allowed
efficiency: organisation
chaos: confusion



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Theme: Liberation

Context: Peter describes the liberation of Terezin by the Russians in May 1945. He was seven at the time

Page numbers: p46 (“Terezin was liberated...”) to p47 (“...at the end of May.”)

Approximate word count: 80

GLOSSARY

Terezin: transit camp where Jewish people were imprisoned before being deported to death or slave labour camps

liberated: freed

Russian army: the Russians were fighting with the Allies against Nazi Germany

raging: spreading very quickly

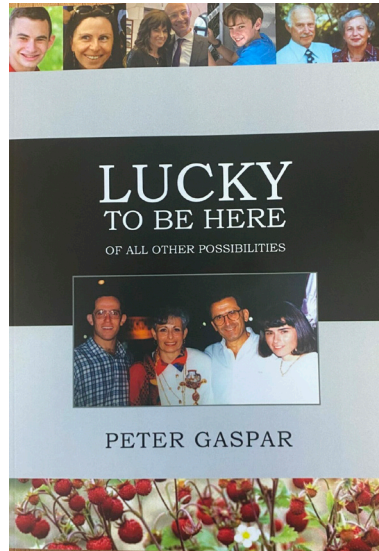
epidemic: widespread infectious disease

typhus: an infection/illness that spreads quickly

assumed: taken over

authorities: those now in charge

Bratislava: capital of Slovakia, Peter’s hometown



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Theme: Return to Life

Context: Peter describes returning to his family home in Bratislava with his mother after their liberation from Terezin, and the start of their return to life.

Page numbers: p50 (“Mum and I...”) to p51 (“...with the returning army.”)

Approximate word count: 350

GLOSSARY

neglected: uncared for

fixtures and fittings: household items

looted: stolen, typically during a time of war or chaos

habitable: liveable

bed linen: sheets and blankets

rumpled: creased; messed up

unaccounted for: missing

perished: died, mostly as a result of being murdered by Nazis

turning up out of the blue: appearing all of a sudden

evidence: information

Displaced Persons Camp: a temporary camp where survivors were given protection and assistance until they could find somewhere to live

Jewish Holocaust Centre: now called the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, the largest institution in Australia dedicated solely to Holocaust education, research and remembrance

Terezin: transit camp where Jewish people were imprisoned before being deported to death or slave labour camps

concentration camps: places where Jewish people were imprisoned by the Nazis

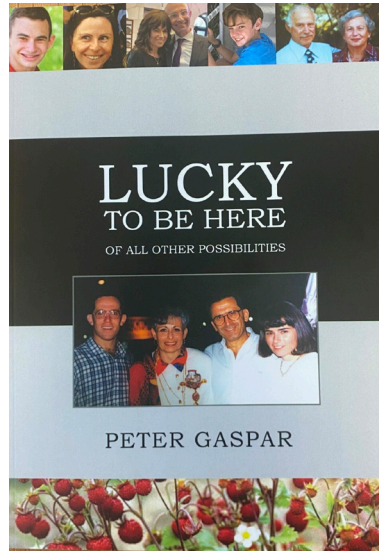
liberated: freed

hitched a ride: travelled for free

transit camps: temporary camps

recuperation: rest and recovery

Red Cross: charity formed to protect human life and health and prevent suffering



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Theme: Legacy and Life Lessons

Context: While most of his extended family were murdered by the Nazis, Peter and his parents survived and migrated to Australia in 1949. In this extract, Peter describes the impact surviving the Holocaust as a young child has had on his adult life.

Page numbers: xi (“I also felt my parents...”) to xii (...attribute this to my early life.”)

Approximate word count: 350

GLOSSARY

dwell: to think intensely about something over a long period of time

Communism: political and economic system in which all property is owned by the state and, in theory, distributed equally, creating a classless society

intervened: occurred

envisioned: imagined

immediate family: Peter and his mother and father (as opposed to his extended family, who were almost all murdered)

intact: complete

skeptical [sceptical]: not easily convinced

scars: permanent signs of damage

attribute: lay blame on something

speculation: guessing

security: being or feeling safe

prime motivation: driving force

uppermost: most important

attribute: link; connect

