

Witness



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"When the sun came up, it was not like the sun -- I swear to you! It was not bright. It was always red to me; it was always black to me. It never said, never, never was life to me. It was destruction! The sun was never beautiful." -- Edith P., survivor of Auschwitz and Salzwedel concentration camps "I was born on the train and I died on the train. I actually didn't know why I was there on the train and what was happening to us. I wasn't even alive. I wasn't there." -- Bessie K., age 19, deported 1943 "What I felt when the liberation came? That I am alone in the whole world....I had no desire to live. I had no place to go. I had nobody to talk to. I was just simply lost, without words." -- Hanna F., sole survivor of her family of five Fifty-five years after the end of World War II, the Holocaust continues to cast a dark shadow. Historians, theologians, philosophers, and others have tried to explain how and why the Holocaust occurred, but their theories often give short shrift to the personal accounts of the individuals involved. For the past twenty years, the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University has sought to preserve the human side of this inhuman era by videotaping testimonies from those who lived through the Nazi era, a project that has led to an acclaimed documentary film and this extraordinary book. As the noted Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer writes in his foreword, "Without survivor testimony, the human dimension of the catastrophe would remain a subject of speculation. The voices of the victimized provide us with an

intimate glimpse of daily existence [and] furnish a version of the atrocity that the killers chose not to preserve." In "Witness: Voices from the Holocaust," Joshua M. Greene and Shiva Kumar weave a single and compelling narrative from the first-person accounts of twenty-seven witnesses, including Jews, Gentiles, Americans, a member of the Hitler Youth, a Jesuit priest, resistance fighters, and child survivors. They tell stories of life under the Nazis, in the ghettos, concentration camps, and death camps, and they recount the mixed emotions that accompanied liberation and persisted in the years following the Holocaust. Their experiences reveal what it is like to live in a world where there were no clear moral options, and most choices were between bad and worse; even for those who survived, there were no happy endings. The vivid and detailed memories of these witnesses testify to the continuing impact of this human catastrophe, and their impassioned words lend immediacy to events that resonate to this day.

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