

VE Day: the girl who survived Auschwitz

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A childhood shattered: Iby's family was not a religious one and she attended a German language school until authorities forced her to move to a Jewish school.

Could a Holocaust happen again? Iby Knill's story is a horrifying example of how an ordinary life can be turned upside down.

What's happening?

Iby grew up in a **Jewish** family in **Czechoslovakia**. In late 1938 German soldiers took over the country. Jews were forced to wear a yellow **Star of David** and Iby's family were forced to leave their flat.

In 1942 Iby escaped to **Hungary**. She helped to hide **Allied** airmen who had been shot down.

Find out more

In the end she was caught. In June 1944 she was sent to a **concentration camp** called **Auschwitz** in Poland. On arrival her hair was shaved off and she was given a prison uniform. At night she was crammed into a hut with 250 others.

After a few weeks she was moved to the town of Lippstadt. There, because she spoke German, she was put in charge of the camp's hospital. She found herself nursing prisoners with **typhoid**.

At the end of March 1945 the prisoners were forced to begin a march of 220 kilometres to another camp at **Bergen-Belsen**.

"Those lagging behind were shot," she remembered. "I developed problems in my hip and found it difficult to walk. My friends supported me and helped

me to keep going."

Then, on Easter Day, they saw American soldiers in the distance. Iby was free.

After the war, she married a British officer called Bert Knill and moved to England, where she lived until her death in 2022.

Around six million Jews were murdered in the **Holocaust**: two thirds of all the Jews in Europe.

Of those, 960,000 died at Auschwitz. With them were killed 140,000 other people thought undesirable by the **Nazis**, such as **Roma** people.

Could a Holocaust happen again?

Some say

Yes! Extreme political ideas are on the rise in countries around the world. Modern technology gives **dictators** huge power. And the Holocaust was not the last **genocide**.

Others think

No! Thanks to people like Iby who spoke out about the horrors they faced, the world is aware of the terrible events that took place during the Holocaust. We will not let it happen again.

Some people say

"If we forget, the dead will be killed a second time."

Elie Wiesel (1928 – 2016), Romanian-American writer

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - How does Iby's story make you feel? Have you studied the Holocaust?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: How many other people survived Auschwitz?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Do you think you have learned enough about the Holocaust at school?

5. Express

What do others believe? - Are people who do evil things always evil themselves? Discuss as a class.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine you are asked to help with a memorial to Iby. Write a poem for it.

Glossary

Jewish - Relating or belonging to the religion of Judaism.

Czechoslovakia - Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

Star of David - A six-pointed star recognised as a symbol of Judaism.

Hungary - A country in central Europe. Viktor Orbán has been its prime minister since 2010.

Allied - Relating to Britain and its allies in World War One and Two.

Concentration camp - A large prison for people held without legal justification, such as political prisoners or persecuted minorities. The first concentration camps were built by British colonial rulers in South Africa, but the term is most associated with Nazi camps, some of which were used to execute Jewish and other inmates as well as to imprison them.

Auschwitz - Nazi death camp where over a million people lost their lives during WW2.

Typhoid - A dangerous bacterial infection.

Bergen-Belsen - A concentration camp in northern Germany. Although it was not a death camp, overcrowding, lack of food and poor sanitation meant that tens of thousands died there of disease and starvation.

Holocaust - The murder of six million Jewish people in Europe by Nazi Germany. Members of other minority groups were also killed.

Nazis - A German political party of the twentieth century, led by Adolf Hitler. The Nazis controlled Germany from the early 1930s until the end of World War II.

Roma - A travelling community who are thought to have originated in India.

Dictators - Rulers with total power over a country.

Genocide - The annihilation of a people, either through killing of its members, or through the suppression of its culture.