Single Handed: The Inspiring True Story of Tibor "Teddy" Rubin--Holocaust Survivor, Korean War Hero, and Medal of Honor Recipient

Daniel M. Cohen
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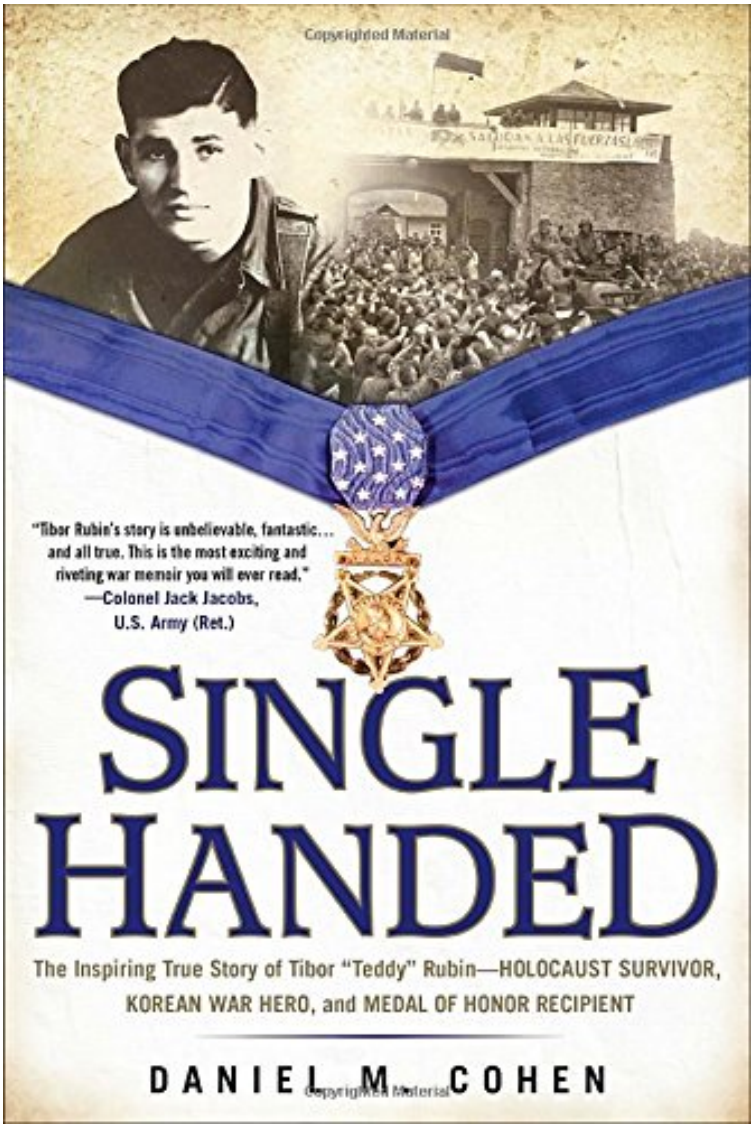

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Daniel M. Cohen : Single Handed: The Inspiring True Story of Tibor "Teddy" Rubin--Holocaust Survivor, Korean War Hero, and Medal of Honor Recipient before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Single Handed: The Inspiring True Story of Tibor "Teddy" Rubin--Holocaust Survivor,

Korean War Hero, and Medal of Honor Recipient:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. 'SINGLE HANDED'AN UNPARALLELED STORY OF BRAVERY, PATRIOTISM AN DTHE HUMAN SPIRITBy Louis SpiritoImagine you're a 13-year old Jewish boy forced to flee your home in Hungary to avoid being taken by the Nazis. Only miles from the Swiss border, you're captured and sent to the dreaded Mauthausen concentration camp where a single misstep - a defiant look, a botched work assignment, a single louse in your hair - could mean instant execution. Through guile, courage and luck, you survive the Holocaust and make your way to America. While other young refugees are busy milking the opportunities in their new homeland, you do the unthinkable and enlist in the U.S. Armywhere you volunteer to fight the communists in Korea. The enemy is fierce but the greatest danger lies in the bigotry of a redneck U.S. Sergeant who continually puts you in harms way because you're a Jew. Fighting valiantly to save yourself and your fellow soldiers, your bravery will earn the praise of commanding officers who twice recommend you for the Medal of Honor - an award you won't receive for another 50 years.There's no need to 'imagine' any such tale. Tibor 'Teddy' Rubin lived it all, and Daniel M. Cohen brings his remarkable journey to light in his riveting new book, SINGLE HANDED(Penguin). In his brilliant recounting of Tibor's amazing odyssey, Cohen offers such vibrant detail and honest, raw emotion that we can almost feel the terror and utter deprivation of of the Nazi death camp, and the numbing cold and carnage of the bloody Korean battlefield. What stands out amid the horror and struggle , though, is the indefatigable, upbeat spirit of the spritely little Hungarian who went far, far above the call of duty, continually placing himself in harm's way to protect his fellow prisoners and soldiers, only to see his bravery and sacrifice ignored by the country he loved and fought for. Painstakingly researched and drawn from hours of interviews with Rubin, his relatives and friends, SINGLE HANDED gives us a life-affirming portrait of a caring, humble, remarkable man whose life defines the terms 'hero' and 'patriot'.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Here's to Major Teddy Rubin....from New York City....By max turkan excellent book, about a courageous family from a small town in hungary and how the war (ww2) affected them. the goose stepping nazis (a bubonic plague on steroids) and their always eager to please collaborators could not kill the spirit of little teddy rubin who suffered the separation from his family and then the agony of a concentration camp and, as if this was not enough, he survived, then traveled to america enlisted in the u.s. army, had to put up with descrimination, and fought like a tiger against another goose stepping gang..the north koreans...this inspiring narrative is a great story and a warning that democracy, with all it faults and imperfections, its the best game in town and that there are men like teddy always on the ready to defend, at any cost, liberty and justice for all....2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A captivating book that will grab you from the start.By ChocolateblueI just finished reading this well-written book and I found it to be fascinating! What an interesting person the hero,Tibor Rubin, is!First, he somehow survives a horrible World War II concentration camp. He then decides to emigrate to the United States, and before he even becomes a citizen, he decides to join the military to help fight in Korea. Then he somehow survives several years as a POW during the Korean War. And worse of all, he had to put up with a very prejudiced commanding officer who hated blacks, Jews and any one else who was different. Through all his trials a tribulations, he is able to help his comrades, finds food for all and literally helps to save lives of his comrades. He always had a great attitude and was an asset to anyone who knew him.What a wonderful person Tibor Rubon is! I wish everyone had his attitude, fortitude and sense of humor. I loved this book and I highly recommend it!

From a World War II concentration camp to the Korean War to the White House, this is the story of Tibor Teddy Rubin, the only Holocaust survivor ever to receive a Medal of Honor... After being captured by Nazis and living through a year in the Mauthausen concentration camp, young Hungarian immigrant Tibor Rubin arrived in America, penniless and barely speaking English. In 1950, he volunteered for service in the Korean War. After numerous acts of heroism, including single-handedly defending a hill against enemy soldiers, rescuing a wounded comrade amid sniper fire, and commandeering a machine gun, he was captured and spent two and a half years in captivity. Still, it wasnt until 2005, when Tibor was seventy-six, that he received the Medal of Honor from President George W. Bushmaking the former Hungarian refugee the only Holocaust survivor to earn Americas highest military distinction. Drawing on eyewitness accounts and extensive interviews, Single-Handed is the inspiring account of the life of Tibor Teddy Rubin, a stirring portrait of a true American hero.

This is the most exciting and riveting war memoir you will ever read.Colonel Jack Jacobs, U.S. Army (Ret.) Daniel Cohen has captured the essence of unblemished character and raw courage...demonstrating that heroism outlasts prejudice.Colonel Cole C. Kingseed, coauthor of Beyond Band of Brothers and author of Conversations with Major Dick Winters Captivating from page one...Rubins life story offers a narrative of the truly extraordinary.Marcus Brotherton, bestselling author of Shiftys War A real page-turner.Larry Alexander, national bestselling author of Biggest Brother and coauthor of A Higher CallA story of endurance, bravery and determination that rivals that of Louis Zamperini, the hero of Laura Hillenbrands UnbrokenReaders cannot help but be inspired.The Associated

PressAbout the AuthorDaniel M. Cohen has worked as a filmmaker, journalist, and film critic for more than thirty years. He has written and directed award-winning independent features and continues to work as a film critic. He lives in Santa Monica, California.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.WASHINGTON, 2005When the old veteran stepped out of the limousine, he hurt all over. His bad knee was the size of a softball. Both hips ached. His hands burned with arthritis, especially the right one, which was still riddled with shrapnel. Arterial sclerosis shortened his breath and jet lag made him weary and light-headed. With every step, his feet throbbed from neuropathy.The former corporal had been hospitalized five times the previous year. His prognosis, on a slew of ills from heart disease to diabetes, was not good. But he had advised the doctors not to worry; he had taken matters into his own hands and had decided to live. He soon proved that he was stronger than his ailments, and now, as he entered an elegant drawing room, each new sensation, from the hum of excited conversation, to the clouds of sweet perfume, to the rustle of expensive suits, erased a little more of his chronic pain.The old soldier would have preferred a seat, but his instructions were to stand. Remaining on his feet was a challenge, but it offered him a good view of the crowd. The people who meant the most to him were right up front; his wife, Yvonne, and their two kids; Dick and Leo, his only buddies still alive from Korea; Bud, the vet whom he had dubbed his chief of staff; and Michelle, the activist who had guided him through twenty years of soul-numbing setbacks. Finally there was his sister-in-law, Gloriathe last survivor of his immediate family, a woman who had never liked him and probably still considered him a womanizing bum. The other hundred and fiftyhigh-ranking bureaucrats, rows of men and women in dress uniforms that looked freshly delivered from the dry cleaners, a smattering of bearded rabbiswere strangers. He nodded at one and all just the same.A flurry of flashbulbs lit the room. Guests rose in a wave. The veteran squared his stance and put on a smile for President George Bushthe younger Bushwho entered briskly and took a place near the podium. Then a chaplain opened the ceremony. Almighty God, we are never beyond the touch of Your hand...God, again. Over the past seven decades the old man had prayed to, argued with, and on occasion angrily cursed Him. In his lowest moments hed sworn that if they ever met, hed sue Him. Recently, hed pretended that He didnt exist. But now He was back. For better or worse, God had followed him to the White House.The chaplain continued. We have joined here to honor a great soldier and American hero, Corporal Tibor Rubin...After the benediction President Bush spoke affectionately about a Hungarian teenager who had survived a year in a German concentration camp, emigrated to America, joined the U.S. Army, and volunteered for service in the Korean War. Then came a remarkable service record.Tibor Rubin defended a hill single-handedly against a massive onslaught of North Koreans. Later, he manned a machine gun and held off waves of attackers on his own. Then, after his capture by the Chinese, he helped fellow GIs to survive two and a half years of captivity. He used knowledge gained in the concentration camp to nurse sick buddies back to health and risked his life to steal food for them. And when the Chinese command offered to send him back to Communist Hungary, he declared that he preferred to remain with his American brothers, even though he was not a U.S. citizen.The president got the high points right, but there were gaping holes in his narrative. He failed to mention the anti-Semitic sergeant who had repeatedly volunteered Rubin for dangerous missions, who had ordered the private to remain with an ammunition dump while the rest of the company retreated. The president did not reveal that this same sergeant had ditched the paperwork from at least two company commanders that recommended Rubin for a Medal of Honor. Nor did the president explain that for twenty-five years the Armys awards division had ignored the eyewitness accounts, notarized statements, petitions, and pleas of veterans organizations and legislators to recognize Rubin for his selfless courage. Was the president aware that, ultimately, it had taken an act of Congress for Tibor Rubin even to be considered for the medal?When President Bush finished, an army spokesman read the official citation that honored Tibor Ted Rubin for conspicuous gallantry and extraordinary heroism... above and beyond the call of duty. Then, as he had been instructed, the seventy-six-year-old turned to one side, enabling the president to drape the Medal of Honor around his neck. A brief prayer followed, and the ceremony concluded.It had been more than fifty years since the kid they were honoring had come home from Korea. For most of that time hed been all but anonymous. But now, according to tradition, whenever Tibor Rubin wore his medal, every soldier from privates to five-star generals was to acknowledge him with a salute, and to address him as sir or mister.As he was escorted to the Pentagon, where he was to be inducted into the Hall of Heroes, Tibor Rubin reflected on the events of recent years. All but two of the handful of veterans who had struggled for so long on his behalf were gone. Did the powers that be, some sitting before him in the best seats, really understand what these men had enduredfirst during the war; then, over the past twenty-five yearsin order to make this twenty-minute ceremony happen? And would it have made any difference had they understood? Maybe. Or maybe not.A few years ago, when all of this pomp and ceremony was still a dream, Tibor had told a reporter that what he wanted most of all was for everyone to know that there was a little greenhorn, a little schmuck from Hungary, who had fought for his beloved country. Today, he had cracked to another reporter that he was now Mister Schmuck, the hero.With the Medal of Honor finally resting on his chest, Tibor Rubin limped on to the Hall of Heroes, where he smiled for photographers, shook hands with guests, and kept his true history to himself.Pszt, 19381Tibor Rubins first encounter with death came when he was nine years old. It was on a warm September morning in 1938, in the small Hungarian town of Pszt, about a hundred kilometers from Budapest. Shortly after breakfast Tibors father took the slight, close-cropped boy to the house of an elderly neighbor and ushered him into a darkened bedroom. The neighbor,

a respected member of the Jewish community, lay on a bed, covered by a black blanket.It was the first time that the boy had ever been so close to a dead body. His mischievous smile turned to a frown. Frightened, he tugged his fathers arm. He wanted to run, but Ferenc Rubin held him fast and, in a stern voice, explained that according to Jewish law, the dead could not be left alone, and that since the others in the community were busy, Tibor would have to keep the body company until the burial service, late that afternoon. His father made it clear that the boy was not to leave the house for any reason. A moment later Ferenc was gone.Ever since Tibor had cowered in his seat watching Frankenstein in Pszts only movie theater, he had been fearful of the dead, particularly of their coming back to life. But it was unthinkable to disobey his father. He perched as far away from the dead man as he could and kept a close watch on the black blanket in case the body beneath it showed any signs of life. He resolved that if it moved, even an inch, he would crawl under the bed and cry for help. But he would not leave.Rubin Family, circa 1939. Left to right (front): Ilonka, Rosa, Ferenc, Tibor (back): Irene, Edith, EmeryFamily of Irene RubinTibors worst fears about the dead neighbor never came to pass. The body remained still until the burial party arrived and relieved him. Then he sprinted home and bragged to his brother and sisters that he had survived an entire day within spitting distance of a dead man. Even his four-year-old sister was amazed.Tibor thought his duty was done, but Ferenc was so proud of his performance that he volunteered him to act as the guardian of the dead, the shomer, whenever the need arose.The thought of it paralyzed Tibor, but he couldnt argue with his father. That was unheard of in the Rubin house.From the time the Rubin children were toddlers, Ferenc Rubin had maintained a powerful grip over them. He demanded that their rooms be immaculate and conducted daily inspections. He made sure that after school they went straight to Hebrew classes. And the night of the Sabbath, he ordered them to take whatever small change was in their pockets and deposit it in the synagogue poor box.Emery and Tibor, circa early 1940s.Family of Irene RubinBut there was another side to his father that confused Tibor. While Ferenc was strict about their Jewish identity, he insisted that the children mix with both Jews and non-Jews, and that they regard everyone in town with the same respect. This frustrated Tibor because on Saturday, when his gentile friends were out having fun, his father made him stay home to study the Torah. What made it even worse was that on some Saturdays, his handsome brother, Emery, who was seven years older, managed to slip away to play soccer. None of it made sense.Tibor complied with Ferencs rules, but he never got over his fear of the dead. If he heard a rumor that an older member of the community was sick, he tried to keep his distance from Ferenc. If their condition worsened, he hid in the woods.Then a lawyer passed away, a widower whose wife had been deceased for several years. Since he had no relatives in Pszt, Tibor was once again recruited to keep the dead man company. Midway through the afternoon, after his nerves settled, Tibor stretched out on a chaise longue and fell asleep. When he awoke, the body was uncovered. Suddenly the boy was staring at a dead man.Had the corpse miraculously come back to life? Had evil spirits somehow reanimated him, like in Frankenstein? If not, then what was the black blanket doing on the floor?Tibors first impulse was to run out and slam the door behind him, but that would certainly result in punishment. He thought to cover his head with a pillow or crawl under the chaise, but how would that protect him? Then, after a nerve-jangling minute of uncertainty during which the corpse remained perfectly still, Tibor developed a competing impulse, almost as strong as his near panic: to see what a dead man looked like close up. So he took a deep breath and faced him straight on. No movement. He took a step nearer. The body remained stone still on the bed. Creeping closer, Tibor observed its limply cupped hands, its eyes focused dimly at the ceiling, its mouth slightly open, as though the man had passed in the act of prayer. Despite the first bolts of fear, no vengeful spirits descended to scold Tibor for allowing the blanket to drop and expose the mans corpse. As he examined it at arms length, he realized that there was nothing to fear from a body once its soul had departed. In fact, it was actually quite peaceful.At that moment young Tibor Rubin came to an accommodation with death. While the process of dying was still a dark mystery, the dead no longer controlled the same terror-filled space in his mind. On a level that he was barely aware of, Tibor became a different person.2Because he had so faithfully fulfilled his obligations, Tibor hoped that his father might allow him to slack off on Hebrew school. He felt that the tongue-twisting Hebrew and endless Jewish laws were just too much to bear. Beyond that, he thought he got enough religion at home. But Ferenc wouldnt hear of it. He forbade the boy from missing a single class.Tibor didnt understand his father. While he dressed like a modern man, with his suits, bowler hats, and stylish mustache, he didnt act like one. And though the older kids said that hed become kinder since the birth of Ilonkahis youngest daughterhe remained inflexible about their religious training.Tibor was dutiful, but he couldnt tolerate Jewish school day after day, no matter how hard his father pressed him. When he was caught skipping class, the rabbi sent angry notes home to his parents. After several such notes, Ferenc concluded that his dim-witted youngest son lacked character and that he would never be of any use to himself or the community.But Tibors mother, Rosa, who was far more forgiving, disagreed, and together she and Tibor conspired to prove his father wrong. Since there was only one car in their town of six thousanda taxiand since postage was expensive, Rosa encouraged Tibor to start a delivery service. The work would keep him busy at the same time that it served the community. Soon Tibor was trotting from one neighborhood to another, delivering everything from wedding invitations to shoes from Ferencs store. As he made the rounds from house to house, grateful customers handed him small tips for his efforts. Gradually his pockets filled with coins.He liked the feeling of having a little money. For the first time he could buy sweets for himself and his friends and tickets for the movies, despite his fathers

disapproval. Ferenc considered the comedies, adventures, and thrillers that Tibor craved a bad influence, a distraction from the real responsibilities of life. But once Tibor had money of his own, he stole away to Pszts little theater whenever he wanted. Tibor adored Laurel and Hardy, Tarzan, and Frankenstein, which he saw four times. But more than anything else, he loved movies about America.The United States of America struck Tibor as the biggest and best country in the world. Its cowboys and gangsters and detectives and daredevils thrilled him. He was awed by its wide-open spaces and towering cities. America was a magical land where people talked to each other on telephones, dressed in top hats and tails, and drove gleaming automobiles.Tibor promised himself that one day he would leave Pszt and its oppressive Jewish school behind. He would dump all of it and travel to America, where he could live free of the arcane laws his father and the rabbis had forced down his throat. But the boy didnt realize that it was already too late for that, too late to wipe his brain clean of history and the complicated regimen of Jewish life. At the age of nine, Tibor didnt appreciate the impact that the rabbi, his father, his community, and the Torah had already made, and how the rigorous traditions that seemed like such a burden would later inspire his countless acts of selfless bravery.3Tibor was ten years old when a bearded young man wearing an oil-stained coat and muddy shoes appeared at the Rubins door. After welcoming the stranger into their house, Tibors mother took him aside. Your cousin from America has come to visit, she whispered. But its been so long since hes been here that your father and I need to spend time with him alone.Tibor was eager to talk to the cousin about his fascinating life in America, but most of the conversation at the dinner table was in Yiddish, and Tibor didnt speak a word of it. Later, he was even more disappointed when his father dismissed the children from the living room so that the adults could socialize in private.It struck Tibor as odd that the three adults stayed up all night talking. Perhaps there was something unusual about this relative that Ferenc and Rosa had not explained to him. Early the next morning, before he could air his questions, Rosa dispatched him to take his cousin to meet their Jewish neighbors. Bring him to the door and introduce him, but stay outside the house so they can talk alone, she said, in a deliberate, unwavering voice.Tibor dutifully walked his cousin through their neighborhood. He knocked on doors, explained who the man was, and then waited outside while the visits took place. Throughout the exercise, this cousin remained an enigma. While it was Tibors impression that everyone in America was richat least it seemed that way in the moviesthis mans clothes were old and worn. There was dirt under his fingernails, patches on his jacket, and white specks in his hair. But since the cousin spoke almost no Hungarian, Tibor was unable to ask him to explain.As the morning wore on, Tibors disappointment turned darker. Here he was, walking through town with a visitor from America, a relative no less, whom he couldnt talk to. After a day of mounting anger, he and the cousin returned home. Then, when supper was over, the curious man said good-bye and abruptly left. From that day forward, no one in the family made any mention of him.Other cousins, then friends of cousins, began to visit the Rubin house. Most of their conversations with Ferenc and Rosa were in Yiddish, so Tibor never really became acquainted with them. The visitors would stay for a day or so, meet with other Jewish families in the village, then quietly leave. From Tibors point of view, it all seemed very strange. Then one day, while he and Emery were kicking a soccer ball back and forth, Tibor groused about having to move out of his room so that still another cousin could sleep in his bed.If I tell you something, can you keep your mouth shut? Emery asked, gesturing him closer.Tibor nodded. His brother, almost seventeen and more than a full head taller, knelt down so that the two were eye to eye.Tibor felt closer to Emery than to their father. Ferenc was dour and strict, while Emery was cheerful and free-spirited. If Ferenc took the time to focus on Tibor, it was usually to discipline him, whereas Emery always seemed eager to listen to his younger brother.Theyre not cousins, Emery whispered. Theyre not even friends. Theyre Poles and Germans, running from the Nazis.Then why do we always take them to the neighbors?To ask for money. Theyre poor, and they need money to travel.As far back as he could remember, Tibor had overheard snippets of conversation about the Nazis, mainly in whispers. But recently hed heard people in the shoe store complain that on account of the Nazis, Jews in Budapest had lost their jobs. Now his brother had made a connection between the Nazis and the frequent visitors to the family home. It frightened him.You have to swear not to mention this to anybody, Emery continued, to keep it to yourself.Tibor nodded.No, you have to swear, Emery insisted with a steely gaze.I swear, Tibor said nervously. But are the Nazis coming for us?Of course not, Emery said with a laugh.Emery patted his little brothers shoulder, tossed the soccer ball into the air, and bounced it off his head with a stiff grunt.As Tibor chased the ball down the street, he felt a wave of relief. Although the mention of Nazis had sent a chill through him, it soon went away. If Emery didnt worry about Nazis, why should he? 4Although they didnt discuss the war with their children, Ferenc and Rosa became increasingly disturbed by the reports they heard, first from their guests, then later when Hungary officially allied with Germany against Russia. Because most of her family lived in Budapest, Rosa worried over the dark, anti-Semitic pronouncements that issued from the government. But her relatives, longtime residents of the city, told her not to worry. They reminded her that the large and affluent Jewish community had endured other, similar periods of unrest and discomfort with anti-Semitic undertones.During Rosas childhood, when Mikls Horthy, an admiral from the Austro-Hungarian Navy, became the regent of Hungary, he had publicly proclaimed that too many banks, businesses, and theaters were in Jewish hands. That was back in the 1920s, when, in the wake of the Great War, the country agonized over the breakup of its empire. In order to keep their jobs and status, a number of her parents friends had converted to Christianity. But it was also known that Horthy maintained close ties to Jews who had fought alongside him during the

Great War, some of whom had remained his trusted advisers. And though Hungary had made a pact with Germany, mainly in order to reclaim part of its empire, Horthy had resisted Hitlers program of vilifying Jews, and still supported a contingent of Jewish officers in his Army. Beyond that, Rosas relatives pointed out that the countrys two-hundredth anniversary celebration had been held in the citys glittering synagogue, one of the largest and most beautiful in Europe. But it was not enough to ease her fears.By the time Tibor was twelve, in 1942, he was familiar with the Nazis, Adolf Hitler, and the war that was raging through most of Europe. Hungary was fighting on the side of the Germans, its Army engaged against the feared Russian forces on the Eastern Front. Although there were no hostilities on the border, reports from Russia were constantly on the radio and in the newspapers. But life in Pszt remained the same. Every morning Tibor milked their four goats, baled hay for the horse, and cleaned his fathers pigeon coop. Then he was off to public school.But that spring the family received disturbing news from Tibors half brother, Mikls, who lived in nearby Czechoslovakia. Earlier that year, local authorities had gone through every Jewish home in the small city of Khust, and confiscated the radios. Jewish teachers were fired from the schools, and synagogues were shuttered. Finally and most disturbing, the half brother was impressed into government service and sent to work at a postal depot outside Budapest. It was especially troubling since Mikls, who was fifteen years older than Tibor, was forced to leave his wife and small child. But the rabbis in Khust urged people not to panic: they insisted that the war would soon end and life would return to normal. Jewish leaders in Pszt agreed, and put the dark stories of restrictions and forced labor out of their minds.Tibors bar mitzvah, the ceremony that confirmed him as a fully responsible member of the Jewish community, a son of the law, took place in June of 1943, when he turned thirteen. As his entire congregation bore witness, Tibor pledged himself to his family, his neighbors, his fellow man, and above all, to God, although he wasnt sure he could make good on the promises. It seemed that sooner or later all that responsibility would come down on his head. But the day of the celebration the gifts and praise, including the approval of his father, distracted him. Best of all, his godfather presented him with a luxurious blue suit, which included a jacket, a white shirt, and a tie, none of which Tibor had ever owned before. A few days later he wore the new suit, now his proudest possession, on a trip to Budapest that had been arranged by Emery.Although it was less than two hours by train, Tibor had never been to Budapest. Hed seen images of the capital in newsreels and magazines but they had not prepared him for its magnificence. He was astonished by the Gothic church spires, a row of palaces, the massive parliament building, and mosques that dated back to the rule of the Turks. And while so much of the city seemed ancient, the grand boulevards teemed with motorcars, trolleys, neon signs, and elegant women in summer dresses that barely covered their knees. It was a day of ceaseless wonders. After Tibor and Emery observed the changing of the Palace Guard, they strolled across the massive Chain Bridge that connected Buda and Pest, the west and east sections of the city. They watched ferries and steamboats pass on the mighty Danube River. When the temperature soared they bathed with hundreds of others in a spring-fed municipal pool that seemed to cover half a block. It was way too much to absorb in a single day. As Tibor sleepily boarded the train for home that night, he promised himself that he would return to Budapest, maybe even live there. But what he did not sense was the tension just below its surface, fueled by a war that was moving closer and closer to Hungarys border. The energy of the city of more than a million and a half, which engulfed Tibor the moment he arrived, masked the growing hatred that would soon focus on people like him. He had no inkling that within a year Allied bombings would damage or destroy much of Budapests storied architecture, that a siege pitting the Hungarian and German armies against the Soviets would end in brutal, street to street fighting, and that half of the citys 200,000 Jews would be murdered by their fellow citizens, who held them responsible for all manner of ills, from Hungarys humiliating defeat in World War I, to the oppression of the peasants, to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. 5As the winter of 43 settled in, the Rubins and their neighbors heard radio reports that the war on the Eastern Front was not going well. The BBC stated that after a brutal assault on the heart of Russia, the Hungarian Army had been crushed. Because the BBC was the only source of information from the west, Ferenc and Rosa had no way of assessing its accuracy. Their neighbors argued that the reports from Britain were mostly propaganda. Then, more disturbing news arrived from Czechoslovakia. Miklss wife reported that he had been transferred to a labor camp in Poland, where he was forced to pack supplies for the front and dig graves. Marketa was deeply worried: the leave that Mikls had been granted every month or two had been canceled. It was especially disturbing because he had yet to see their newborn child.Early in 1944, a rumor reached Pszt that Hungarian Jews who lived near the border with Romania were being abducted by roving bands of German gestapo. But there was nothing in the newspapers to substantiate it. In fact, no one in the village had ever spotted a single German police officer. Still, Ferenc and Rosa Rubin were troubled, mainly on behalf of their two boys. Talk of the approaching Russian Army seemed to increase the likelihood that Emery, who was now working as a cabinet maker and living on his own, and even Tibor, might be recruited for work crews, just as Mikls had been.Then word spread through the Rubins synagogue that Jews from the provinces were being picked up on the streets and sent to labor camps on the eastern border. While Ferenc and Rosa thought they might be able to keep Tibor safe at home with their daughtershe was only thirteenthey worried that Emery, who was twenty, would likely be impressed into military service.The family came up with a plan. Rosa had an aunt who lived across the border, in Koice, Czechoslovakia. Because the authorities were keeping a close a watch on Jews, the aunt couldnt take Emery in, but a neighboring gentile, an older woman, had offered to hide him on her farm. Emery and his

closest friend, Alex, made plans to take a train to Koice.Tibor was shocked to hear that Emery was leaving Pzst. First he felt panic, then confusion, then a frantic desire to go along with the two older boys.When Tibor confronted him, Emery made light of the situation. Ill be back before you know it, he said as he pummeled Tibor with a volley of playful rabbit punches.Emery had assured him that the Nazis would never be a problem and that Hungary was safe. Now it was clear that he was wrong. Although it wasnt Emerys fault, Tibor felt betrayed.He took his worries to his parents. Ferenc seemed irritated by his questions and shooed him away, but Rosa did her best to keep his fear in check.Emery will be fine, she said calmly. This is just a precaution.Tibor searched her face for a hint of apprehension, but found nothing to support his feelings of dread. His sisters also seemed comfortable with Emerys plan. Nobody wanted to acknowledge that Tibors brother, his dearest friend and trusted confidant, was about to depart from his life, leaving the future murky and threatening, hostage to a war that had nothing to do with his people.6One quiet night in March, Tibor came home to find seven strangers at the dinner table. He figured that the men were Poles, since none of them spoke a word of Hungarian. By now, he was well accustomed to visitors, but this group was slightly different, older and more contemplative than the others who had shared their table.They arrived at a moment of elevated tension. Several days earlier, a man Tibor didnt know stopped into the shoe store and announced that German tanks had entered Budapest. The Nazis had clamped down on Admiral Horthys government, which could mean trouble for the two hundred thousand Jews in the city. That same day another member of their synagogue had come to talk to Ferenc about the effects of the German occupation on Jews living in the provinces. Ferenc said nothing but Tibor detected nervousness in his eyes.What captured Tibors attention on the night the seven Poles appeared, however, was the tone of the adults conversation. Even in Yiddish, he could sense an air of urgency that verged on anguish. Questions darted back and forth between his parents and the visitors. After dinner, as the conversation continued in the living room, Ferenc and Rosa squabbled openly. It disturbed the children: they had rarely witnessed their parents disagree in the presence of strangers. Then, with no warning, Tibor and his sisters were ordered to their rooms.Tibor crept close to his parents closed door as they prepared for bed. Ferenc and Rosa continued to argue, but now in Hungarian. Tibors father insisted that since Pszt was so close to Budapest, it would probably remain safe. The Germans had met with Jewish leaders in Budapest and assured them that there would be no deportations so long as people cooperated. Rosa angrily disagreed. She accused Ferenc of willful ignorance. Hadnt he listened to the Poles?And what do we do about the girls? Ferenc asked tersely. Suppose they come for them?Rosa was silent for a moment. I dont know, she replied, her voice close to breaking.When Tibor woke the next morning, Rosa and Ferenc were somberly perched at his side. Right away it seemed unusual that Rosa did the talking. She explained that the seven strangers were Poles, as Tibor had suspected, and that they had been on the run for several years. During that time conditions in Poland had only grown worse. Certain that the Germans were about to conscript all young men and boys, they had urged his parents to send Tibor out of Hungary.Youre going on a long walk, Rosa stated calmly. Our guests are taking you to Switzerland.Ferenc grimaced and rubbed his brow. It seemed to Tibor that his father disagreed, although he wouldnt say so.Rosa continued.These are professional men and experienced travelers. If you listen to them and do what they say, youll be safe.Tibor knew nothing about Switzerland, how far it was or what it was like. All he knew was that he didnt want to go.Why cant we all go to Switzerland? he protested.We will come later, Rosa answered firmly. But you must go first.As Tibor continued to object, Rosa looked deeply into his eyes and gently placed her hand over his mouth.After the trouble is over, and it will be over soon, youll return. The men have promised to bring you home.Rosa packed Tibor a satchel of clothing and placed it on his bed along with his winter coat. Tibor went to an armoire and took the prized suit that his godfather had given him on the occasion of his bar mitzvah and carried it back into his bedroom so his mother could pack it with the rest of his things. Rosa said no, the suit wasnt warm enough, but she would take care of it until he returned. Then she prodded Tibor into the kitchen, filled his pockets with fruit and bread, and began to lecture.At night, go into the fields and take whatever you and the men need, she said. Dont worry about it, its all right. You know the things that are safe to eat, dont you?Tibor nodded, even as his heart sank lower with every breath.The seven visitors left the Rubin house early that morning while Rosa prepared Tibor for his journey. After a brief visit to the synagogue, Tibor spent the day with his sistersIrene, Edith, and Ilonka. Each girl gave him a trinket for luck: a change purse, a cap, and extra buttons for his coat, but their kindness only saddened him. As the afternoon shadows grew longer and the house turned dark, Tibor went to his mother and on the verge of tears told her that he couldnt leave home.Rosa smiled and reminded him that as of his bar mitzvah he was a man, in the eyes of both the community and God, and that he could endure this minor inconvenience if he just had faith and remained strong. His mothers steady tone and unblinking gaze calmed him, but later, when his father failed to offer him a prayer book for the trip, he realized that the situation was far thornier than it had seemed.No prayer book for his travels? It was unthinkable. No one ventured far from the Rubin home without a prayer book. Tibors fear escalated when Ferenc forbade the boy from carrying any item that identified him as a Jew. Now he was both confused and afraid.The Poles returned at dark and gathered quietly at the dinner table. The way they kept to themselves, their odd language, their straggly beards, and the earthy odor that rose from their clothes bothered Tibor. They seemed to be part of a world that had nothing to do with him. And now he was their prisoner.During the evening meal the strangers barely spoke. Only the tallest of the group, a man with a deeply lined face and a thick, resonant voice, seemed to acknowledge Tibor. When the others left the

table the tall man stayed behind to chat with Ferenc and Rosa in Yiddish. Then he put his arm on Tibors shoulder and smiled. No one had to tell him that it was time to go.It was just after dark when they left the Rubin house. The harsh cold of the early spring night nipped Tibors fingers and cheek. As they passed the last street of homes, Tibor fell several paces behind his seven companions. Deeply distrustful of their intentions, he vowed that if they acted in any way that struck him as suspicious, he would make a run for home.As the small band moved through an apple orchard, Tibor turned around to take a last look at Pszts lights. Because the ground was level and the trees so close together, he could barely make out the old church tower and the town square. In that moment he realized that there was no turning back. He believed that everyone he cared for was about to leave Pszt, and that if he did return at some unknown point in the future, the people he found there would be strangers to him.The eight travelers hiked the back roads the entire night and rested the better part of the next day. Tibor thought that that was smart. It was cold after the sun went down, so it was good to keep moving. To keep them from being spotted, one man walked thirty meters ahead of the group, while a second followed at the same distance behind, like cavalry in westerns. There was little traffic at night, but if either scout saw lights from an approaching vehicle, he called to the others to move off of the road and into the woods. While Tibor didnt know the extent of the danger, he understood that it was important not to be seen. And he felt completely confident when they were deep within the forests; even though it was winter, the trees, hollows, bluffs, and ravines were rich with hiding places. Tibor believed that he could elude anyone in the woods, especially in the dark.Just before dawn each morning, he left the group in search of food. A country boy who was comfortable in the outdoors, he had foraged for wild berries ever since he had learned to walk. His older sisters, Irene and Edith, had shown him the difference between edible mushrooms and those that were poisonous, when fruits were ripe enough to eat, and how to brew tea from dandelions. When he came to a farm, he was immediately able to identify its storage bins, and to tell the difference between provisions for animals and those for people.The men were surprised to see how often Tibor returned with his pants and shirt filled with corn, dried fruit, and potatoes. Sometimes one or two of them tried to tag along, but they were unable to keep up with him. Tibor was small, wiry, and fastconstantly on the alert for wary landowners or farmhands. If doors slammed or dogs barked, he was quick to make tracks. They couldnt speak very well with the boy, but his travel companions soon came to depend on him to keep their bellies full.Tibor and the Poles spent their mornings and afternoons deep in the forests, resting by streams or hollows. When he was tired, Tibor found a spot twenty or so meters from where the group had settled, then covered his body with leaves and pine needles. He was never comfortable without some form of camouflage. The language barrier continued to trouble him, and because he was never certain where they were headed, he remained suspicious of his companions intentions.To the best of Tibors reckoning, the seven Poles were city people. Their jackets and shirts were frayed but modern. Their glasses were made of delicate wire. Instead of boots, they wore lace-up shoes. Their knapsacks were filled with books, which confounded Tibor since it was trouble enough to carry water and change of clothes.Tibor was interested in knowing more about them, but the only one who understood Hungarian was the tall man, Peter, who spoke like a three-year-old and seemed embarrassed by his limited vocabulary. But this mans fatherly tone slowly whittled away Tibors deepest suspicions.Their plan was to walk south and west to Italy, then to cross the Swiss border into the neutral country that they believed to be a safe haven from Nazis. Peters friend Karl carried a folio of maps in a satchel and daily set their course. The tall man explained that Karl had been a civil engineer before the war, and could tell where they were just by examining the stars.The small band kept to unpaved roads where only horse-drawn wagons and farm equipment traveled. Occasionally a local farmer offered them a ride. When a village appeared, one of the men would enter ahead of the rest, check for German or Hungarian police, and see whether there was a well with fresh drinking water available.One night, during a punishing rainstorm, the group crept into a small hamlet. Between the darkness and the deluge, there was so little visibility that it was impossible to get a feeling for the place. No one was on the street. The tavern was closed. If the village was outfitted with electric lamps, they had been turned off. Tibor and the men were so wet and uncomfortable that they took cover in a dumpy little square and made their beds under the thatched roof of what looked like a market.Tibor awoke before the others, eager to explore his surroundings. In the light of day, the village appeared to be deserted. Most of the windows on the town square were broken. Shattered pottery and broken glass were strewn on the walkways in front of several homes. A row of doors hung from damaged hinges. A shop with shelves of empty bakery pans was half boarded up.An older woman who was dressed like a peasant limped into the square, filled two urns from the cistern, then went straight back into her house, as though being pulled by a magnetic force. If she had noticed Tibor, she made no attempt to communicate. Then he saw the remains of a Torah in the street, unraveled and ripped. The two finials were broken, and the parchmenttwisted, torn, and water-stainedlooked like theyd been exposed to the elements far more than just that one night. Tibor did not understand why.Peter and Karl approached, amiably chatting. When Tibor pointed out the ruined Torah, their tone quickly changed. They capped their canteens and motioned to the road out of town. Tibor was unable to understand their Polish, but one word was clear: gestapo. 7The Rubins heard nothing from Emery after his departure for Koice. Ferenc and Rosa stayed close to the radio in order to hear news from Budapest; all of the reports suggested that the city was calm. Ferenc reprimanded Rosa for having sent Tibor off. He reminded her that they were Hungarians, not Poles or Czechs. But early in April, Hungarian officers arrived in Pszt in a black car and inquired how many Jews lived in

town, and where. Before midday the officers were sighted in several neighborhoods, scribbling notes and taking pictures. Ferenc and Rosa were deeply troubled: no one had ever come to their community looking for information before. But when the Rubins went to their local officials, they were told that the police theyd seen were simply following German protocol, and that loyal citizens like the Rubins had no reason for worry.Irene, the Rubins oldest daughter, became restless after Emery and Tibor left home. Ferenc and Rosa wanted her to stay in Pszt; they continued to believe that their village would remain a safe haven for women and children. But seventeen-year-old Irene countered that many other girls her age had moved to Budapest to ride out the war, and she wanted to go, too. The Jewish community in the capital was large and influential, and Rosa had family there, so Irene could live with one of her aunts. Reluctantly, Ferenc and Rosa gave her their permission.Irene was only gone a few days when orders came from Budapest calling for the resettlement of all Jews, ethnic minorities, and other persons of questionable origin throughout the Hungarian countryside. The official explanation stated that due to the encroaching war and the possibility of invasion, certain groups that might be vulnerable to foreign influence needed to be cleared from all potential battlefields. In addition, those wishing to perform a patriotic duty were encouraged to volunteer for the work camps that now lined their borders.8Two weeks into the long walk to Switzerland, Tibor gave up counting the days. His fellow travelers couldnt say how long it would take to reach their destination, so he resolved to put the problem out of his mind. Once he surrendered to the rhythm of the journey, it became enjoyable. The excitement of raiding fields and sheds of the local farms reduced the chill of the night air. He welcomed dawn with a full belly, opened his shirt to warm his chest in the midday sun, and capped each afternoon with a luxuriously long nap. Although he continued to travel farther and farther from Pszt, he found that the lengthening days and their enduring peacefulness allowed him to imagine that he was somehow moving closer to a reunion with his family.Tibor had no way of knowing that at that moment in time, the entire Jewish community had been removed from Pszt. Or that, in little more than a month, 430,000 Jews had been uprooted from the Hungarian countryside, and that most of them were already dead.Word by word, Tibor and the tall man, Peter, managed to chip away at the language barrier. Tibor learned that one of the travelers was an eye doctor, another a pharmacist, and the others builders or civil engineers. They had been on the run since 1939, and had worked with the resistance in several countries. They had hidden in basements, attics, barns, and even in sewers. All that was left of their former lives were wrinkled photos of wives and children that none of them had seen in years. After five years of running, they were tired.The day the Swiss border appeared before them it was warm enough for Tibor to remove his jacket. Ice and snow glinted off of the surrounding mountains, but their map reader, Karl, guided them through the lower passes and valleys where it was cold but tolerable. They had stumbled through rocky terrain for most of the previous night, but after a long haul from dusk to dawn, Peter pointed to a road that connected Italy with Switzerland. He explained that towns just across the border were more Italian than Swiss, but that they remained a safe haven, which was respected by the Nazis.Tibors father had taken business trips both to Italy and to Switzerland several times a year to see the latest shoe styles in Milan, Florence, and Geneva. He had returned to Pszt with stories about auto-filled streets, bustling cafs, and crowds of operagoers. As he gazed down onto the Swiss border, Tibor felt certain that the moment this war was over, his family would reunite in one of those glamorous cities to begin new and exciting lives.There were two tar-box guardhouses at the checkpoint, flying different flags. A short, rough patch of motorway ran between the gates that separated the countries. Barbed-wire fences were posted as far as Tibor could see. The land on either side of the border was marked by deep and craggy ravines; the only way to pass through it, other than by air, was on that one gravelly road.Karl and Peter agreed that their best chance was to cross at night. The border police would probably be sleepy or drunk; hopefully they would be less inclined to interview all eight of them. They waited until it was dark. Then Karl pulled a smoky glass bottle from his pack, drank, and passed it around. Tibor took one swig and spat it out: it was bitter, like poison. The men laughed, shook hands, recited a quick prayer, and ambled down the hill.Searchlights landed on them before they even reached level ground. Peter, Karl, and another Pole, who spoke Italian, moved in front of the others. A guard appeared from a sharp halo and motioned them forward. Karl withdrew a folded paper from his jacket pocket and waved it in the air. The group remained calm as the soldier examined it. Peter kept his arm on Tibors shoulder, as if to indicate that he was his son. Karl spoke to the guard in what sounded to Tibor like Italian. The guard nodded, moved back several paces, and showed the paper to another armed man.The two soldiers entered the guardhouse. As they waited in silence, the Poles appeared glum. A telephone rang loudly, then echoed, like a bad omen. After what seemed to Tibor like an hour but was probably only a few minutes, the soldiers returned and barked an order. The men hesitated, then glanced at one another and reluctantly dropped their pants. When the guards saw the eight circumcisions, they laughed harshly and motioned them all to lie facedown on the ground with their hands on their heads.From his prone position, Tibor cautiously lifted his eyes. Two steely beams of light rose in the distance, then traveled in a downward arc and drew a bead on the guardhouse. The headlights were attached to a truck that raced straight toward Tibor and his companions, then skidded to a stop in front of them. German soldiers with frosty breath emerged briskly from the cab and matter-of-factly loaded Tibor and the men into the back. The prisoners said nothing to their captors, although a soldier glanced at Tibor, smiled, and spoke a few words in German that were strange to him.He says you have nothing to worry about, Peter translated. Theyre taking you to a very nice camp.Mauthausen, 19441At first glance, Tibor was intrigued by the

hilltop fortress called Mauthausen. It reminded him of a castle that he had seen once in a movie set in the days of King Arthur. But in the movie, there was no swastika mounted above the castle gates.Mauthausen was so big that all Tibor could see from the truck was the front of it. The stone walls looked like they were five times the height of a man. Two huge towers on either side of the gates rose even higher. He couldnt see enough of it to determine the length of the structure, even though the grounds had been leveled and cleared. It seemed to crown the entire hill.Tibor had no idea what the men with machine guns were guarding inside, but he was relieved when the truck slowed down at the entrance. The bumpy, seemingly endless ride through the Austrian hills had jostled his bones and upset his stomach.A signal passed between the driver and a guard. The gates swung open onto a massive plaza, several times the size of a soccer field. Tibor quietly recited a prayer of thanks for having reached a destination, but as he clambered out of the truck, a wretched stench invaded his chest, nose, and throat, which burned his windpipe and left him dazed. It was the stink of rotting flesh and soot, so fierce that it made him choke.A view of the entrance and surrounding walls.United States Holocaust Memorial MuseumAn officer lined the small group up against a wall in the massive, sandy plaza and ordered them not to talk. They waited there alone as the sun went down and the wind turned chilly. The darkness of full night brought on deeper cold, but also an element of mercy: sharp gusts swept away the horrid smells. Finally, a German officer came out to the lineup and asked each man to say his name and country of origin. When he pointed to Tibor, Peter said that the boy was eleven, two years less than his true age, and of uncertain nationality. Tibor kept his mouth shut. The officer patted him on the head and moved on.The eight newcomers were sent down a flight of stairs into a bare, concrete room and ordered to strip. Water blasted out of showerheads with such force that Tibor almost toppled over. It was frigid, then scalding, then frigid again. Once soaked, they were herded through a narrow corridor to a grizzled man in striped pajamas who shaved their heads and bodies. The razor moved so quickly that it left a trail of nicks and cuts. The barber laughed when he saw Tibor naked, and cracked that he was his easiest customer all day.A guard ordered them to leave their clothes behind in a pile, for cleaning, then gave them ragged, threadbare shirts and pants that smelled of disinfectant and fit like pajamas. Then they were marched into a group of one-story, boxcar-shaped buildings: the barracks.An older man in a striped jacket known as a barracks elder directed Tibor to a bunk that was already occupied by three grubby men in their twenties. When he saw that they were all to share the same blanket, Tibor decided that he could do without it. His seven friends disappeared into other crowded bunks while Tibor was left to cope with a hash of languages that he had never heard before. For the first time since leaving Pszt, he was truly afraid.That night, he was unable to sleep. First, it was the hard, wooden berth; then the other inmates moving, talking, and arguing. One poor soul howled like an animal while a fierce wind rattled the few windows. It was not so bitter cold as outside, but the air was still sharp, and heavy with body odor. Tibor believed that there was no heat, but as he crept to the commodes at the far end of the building, he saw what looked like a cooking stove. After peeing, he tried to sidle up to it and warm himself, but before he could get close, a voice called out, commanding him to move on.The entire barracks emptied at dawn. When Tibor remained tucked up in his bunk, another elder ordered him to leave. Outside, a slow-moving human river flowed into the large plaza, where thousands of weary men quietly shuffled into orderly columns as the SS pushed through, shouting in German and hitting them with rifle butts. By the time the officers were done calling numbers, the sun was up and the horrid smell had returned.Tibor followed the same human river back to his barracks. It was encouraging when his seven friends gathered around him. He searched their faces for the slightest trace of a smile, or any hint that the worst of their trials might be over. They gave no sign as to what they were feeling, but at that moment just their presence was enough to calm Tibor.A crowd gathered outside the barracks, as though it was a train depot. A cart soon came by and served tins of a hot liquid that looked like a cross between coffee and tea. The taste was bitter, but Tibor drank it because it was warm.Uniformed guards arrived and marched half the prisoners off, leaving the rest to return to their bunks. A few minutes later, men wearing shirts decorated with green triangles entered the barracks, divided residents into small groups, and ordered them out. Peter and his friends were among the first to go. Soon only a few children and several barracks elders remained. In spite of the terrible uncertainty, the room turned peaceful. Then the face of a bright-eyed boy appeared from the bunk above.Hungarian? he asked.Tibor nodded.Just get here?Tibor nodded again. The kid grinned. His teeth were mostly black.Have you heard about the parachutes? he said with a rough laugh.Tibor stared at him.Youve never seen anything like it! he said excitedly.His name was Aron. His father was a doctor, and his mother a nurse; they had been in the fort since Aron was very young, and had worked in the officers infirmary until the SS sent them to the front to care for wounded soldiers. Aron hadnt seen them for several months, but he was certain that they would come back for him as soon as the Germans won the war.Aron dropped to the floor and led Tibor to the alcove with the little stove. A barracks elder was cooking something in a pot.You come with the Poles? the elder asked in broken Hungarian.Tibor nodded.Im the king of the Poles, he stated proudly. You come with Poles, we take care of you.The king cut them several slices off of a boiled potato, then shooed them away.Aron said that they should go outside before the men that he called kapos chose them for a work detail. Tibor was hungry, dizzy, and desperately in need of sleep, but he feared staying in the bunk alone, and followed Aron out.The sky had opened, so that Tibor could see guards, columns of men dressed in loose-fitting striped garments, other barracks, and black smoke idling above the rooftops. Aron pointed out a thorny wood and wire fence that stretched across the far side of the yard.Stay away from that, he cautioned. You get too

close, it pulls you in and burns you up.Tibor didnt quite understand.Aron grinned. Dont worry, it wont happen. They shoot you if you even go near it. But if it does get you, you just hang there, maybe all day, until guards come with a hook and remove your sorry corpse. No more worries.Then he laughed, and led Tibor around the corner to a small, squat building that had a tall, brick chimney. The worst of the smoke was coming from this chimney.Theres a big furnace in there. Aron chuckled. Thats where they take you afterward.It was now midmorning, and the compound had come alive with a swell of harsh noise. Dogs barked in the distance. The shrill cry of metal saws issued from a tar and log shack. The clang of hammers and picks wafted in on the breeze.Two men in stripes passed the boys and made faces at them. These were kapos, Aron explained: prisoners who had been appointed by the camp command to keep the rest of the prisoners in line. They didnt carry rifles, like SS guards, but the heavy rubber truncheons they carried could turn a mans head to mush. Aron claimed to have actually seen that happen, and advised Tibor not to anger them. Some were even-tempered, but others were sadists who would beat you to death if you looked at them the wrong way.Tibor asked about the horrible stench. Aron walked him to the far side of the barracks and pointed to the thirty-foot wall that stretched as far the eye could see.Comes from out there, he said.Aron explained that some time ago, a crowd of Russian soldiers had been brought to the plaza. Those who could work were sent to the barracks, while the sick oneshundreds of them according to Aronwere left standing in the plaza for the entire day. When it turned dark, fire trucks came through the gates and sprayed them down with cold water. They shouted for mercy but the guards didnt care. Machine guns held them in formation until the entire lot of them froze together like an ice sculpture. Because it was impossible to cart their individual bodies into the big furnace, masses of them were scooped up in blocks, carried outside of the gates, and dropped into a shallow ditch. When the weather warmed, the ice sculptures melted. In the days that followed they had begun to rot. That was where the worst of the stench came from.A wagon stopped at the barracks entrance with lunch. The boys got a bowl of brown soup with bits of beets floating in it, and a fist-sized round of black bread. Tibor took two bites of the bread and gave up on it: the crust was hard and the inside more like hard-packed dirt than flour. He started to put the uneaten part into his pocket, but Aron stopped him. He explained that if other prisoners saw him eating at any time other than lunch or dinner, theyd follow him, take his food, and search him for more. He might even be hurt in the process. And if no man found his scraps of food, the lice certainly would.Aron took Tibor to a tattered sign that had been tacked to one end of their barracks. It showed a picture of a louse with an equals sign and the word DEATH.One louse could get you killed, Aron said.Tibor didnt understand. Lice, tiny white insects that got into your hair and scalp, were a nuisance, but hardly lethal. In Pszt, when kids contracted head lice they used a fine-tooth comb to get rid of them, or a powder, if they persisted. But Aron said no, the lice were much worse here, because they hid in your clothes and then dug into your skin and sucked your blood. Even worse, lice carried typhus, and if you contracted typhus, you were sent to the hospital so you wouldnt infect anybody else, especially the guards. Worse yet, the poor souls who were sent to the hospital never came back. Arons father had been very clear about that, and had showed his son how to squeeze the eggs out of his clothes before they hatched and got hold of his body.Aron then described a huge pit, just beyond the barracks, where hundreds of men slaved, cutting up rocks. This was the scariest place in the entire fort, the place where the sorriest prisoners worked, where men who displeased the kapos were sent sailing off the top, parachuted, as he explained breathlessly, but without chutes. Aron wanted Tibor to see the pit, but it wasnt possible unless they were picked for certain work details, and that only happened when kapos were short on grown men.Cant we volunteer? Tibor asked.No, Aron said, like Tibor was stupid. You dont do that here.Tibor was confused. What had the people here done to deserve such terrible treatment? How could their keepers behave so cruelly? And why was he here? Was it because he was a Jew, or because he was Hungarian? Aron couldnt say. There was a war on, and that was just the way things were. After a while you stopped thinking about the reasons behind any of it.The residents in Tibors block returned at dark, sweat-soaked and smelling foul. Most of them collapsed without a word. His neighbors jostled and nudged him, then fell asleep. The section turned quiet, but the Poles never showed up. Tibor was terrified. He struggled his way off his tier and combed the entire block: they werent anywhere. Tibor woke Aron and asked what could have happened, but the other boy didnt know. After standing by the door for an hour, Tibor sat down on the floor and quietly cried.Finally his friends appeared, tired and dirty. Because Peter and Lucas were skilled in construction, all seven had been taken outside of the gates to work that day. They explained that a whole new camp was being built several miles down the road, and the engineers thought that the Poles could help. Peter said that they had been lucky on two counts: that he and his friends spoke German, and that the SS needed civil engineers.It rained throughout most of Tibors second day in camp, so he stayed indoors, where he had time to rest, collect himself, and calm down. He thought about his family, which made him, first, sad and then angry. His parents had been crazy to send him on this trip. Surely, he thought, he would have been better off back in Pszt.That evening, an SS officer called out names in the plaza and barked orders that Tibor didnt understand. Tibor turned and saw two prisoners set up a platform near the back wall for a man to play the violin. The sad melody was one that he had heard when he was very young. Then, in the middle of the song, guards walked another man up to the platform, stood him on a chair, dropped a noose around his neck, and pushed him into the open air. Half of the inmates looked the other way; those who observed showed no emotion.After three days, Tibor was convinced that he was going to die in Mauthausen. The food alone would kill him. His stomach hurt all day,

every day, and he came down with uncontrollable diarrhea. Aron seemed amused by Tibors distress; he called it Tibors initiation. But the king of the Poles came to his aid, offering him charcoals from the stove with instructions to chew and swallow them. Eventually, to Tibors amazement, his stomach settled.The rain and chill added to the awful monotony. Aron took to staying in his bunk all day. To every question that Tibor asked him, he responded no. They couldnt see the pit. They couldnt talk to the guards. They couldnt go to the other barracks to look for other children. There were rules, and if you failed to follow them, you could be shot.Aron confused Tibor. He could be friendly one minute and nasty the next, and there was no predicting his mood swings. He seemed to enjoy watching the antics of crazy men, especially when they wandered toward the electric fence, and he got a wild look on his face when he described what it was like to see a man electrocuted. He was only ten and already he was strange.Aron said that the only thing that he could do for Tibor that would not cause trouble was to speak to the laundry supervisor about returning his clothes. Arons parents had helped the supervisor by extracting a bad tooth; Aron thought that he might be willing to do him a favor. The catch was that Tibor would have to give Aron two pieces of bread. Tibor made that deal immediately.Peter laughed when Tibor explained how he had managed to retrieve his clothes, and Karl and the other men seemed genuinely impressed. They said that if anyone could survive in this place, it was Tibor. He began to believe that, indeed, maybe he could.Weeks passed. Some days, Tibor felt light-headed and weary. Others, he was deeply sad and bored. When kapos came around looking for workers, he was tempted to volunteer, but Aron always shouted no, and once he actually held Tibors arm down when he tried to raise it.Residents started to go missing from Tibors block. The howling man who cried all night disappeared. A Romanian who returned from his work with a huge lump on his head passed out and never woke up. Whenever men left, others arrived to fill their bunks. Sometimes two came to take the place of one.Out of sheer boredom, Tibor began to count the numbers at roll call. The plaza was so packed that men stood almost shoulder to shoulder. He came up with a figure of ten thousand, but there might have been even more. One barracks elder said that in the past year, the population had almost doubled, and that because men werent dying fast enough, the Nazis had taken to killing half the new arrivals before they got past the courtyard.2Tibor began to think that any kind of work had to be better than lying around the barracks. In spite of Arons warning, he considered approaching the king of the Poles and offering to help with the housekeeping. When he mentioned the idea, Aron told him that he was crazy and stupid and to keep his mouth shut.Then Peter came to him with a proposition. He and his friends had been selected for a special project outside of camp, which Peter thought of as a stroke of luck, even though he did not yet know what the project entailed. Tibor froze at the idea of them leaving: he couldnt imagine how lonely it would be if the men left him. But Peter calmed his fear.We talked to an officer about you, he said. We told him that you were studying carpentry, and would make a very good assistant.One morning after roll call, Tibor and the Poles were loaded onto a truck and sent through the gates. He turned cheerful as the vehicle rumbled off the road and into a pine forest. An hour into the trip they slowed at a tree-stump-studded clearing that was filled with men and machines, as busy as an ant colony.The truck discharged them at a cluster of military-style tents. The skeleton of a guard tower rose from the compounds center, and open cook fires crackled under a wood and canvas pavilion. A steady flow of vehicles delivered oil drums, railroad ties, steel bars, and wood pallets loaded with construction equipment.A work crew of over fifty, many wearing yellow stars, moved the array of materials closer to the mountain. As Tibor understood it, the project involved excavating the mountain and building a factory inside. It would take the team all summer to accomplish, plus part of fall. Karl, the best German speaker among the Poles, had convinced an SS officer that he and his friends could build a barracks and a dining hall before the cold weather arrived. Peter told Tibor that by thinking on his feet Karl had won them a few months reprieve from the hell of Mauthausen. Tibor held on to the hope that it would last longer.Most of the workforce slept under the stars, but Peters crew was given a fully rigged tent that protected them from the wind and rain. The guards allowed them to use cement bags or wood slabs as beds so that they would not have to sleep on wet ground. Karl even managed to get a kerosene heater from the supply depot.In Tibors mind their move to the forest was a great success. He could finally breathe without the air stinging his nose, and though armed guards swarmed around the workers, almost like hornets, there was no barbed wire or fences. In the day, the woods came alive with the reassuring sights of men felling trees, sawing limbs, and trimming logs. Birds sang brightly, as though it cheered them to see men working in teams. The food was the same gruel as at the fort, but the kitchen was less stingy with portions. Even the guards here seemed different: they took breaks throughout the day to smoke and often gathered to swig beer at night.But terrible things could happen at any moment. Two days into their stay, a sudden shock took Tibor by surprise. He was part of a large crew that was unloading railroad ties, when shouting issued from a ridge directly above them. Tibor looked up and saw several workers tumbling down the hill, head over heels, like circus clowns. It seemed funny until an officer appeared with a gun, firing one shot after another. The prisoners settled into a quiet clump and for a moment were still as the officer stood near them quietly, his pistol drawn. Then one man began a slow crawl toward a patch of high grasses. The officer put the pistol to his temple and fired, point-blank. As the officer looked up from the corpse, Tibor averted his eyes.That incident put the whole camp on edge, but a long period of calm followed, during which the workforce fell into a dependable and reassuring routine. Since Peter and his friends had taken charge of a large and important project, they were permitted to move freely throughout their section. They even made a deal that netted them a few precious

cigarettes.One quiet afternoon, while Karl acted as lookout, Peter took Tibor to the far side of the dirt road where a pile of pine logs was stacked head-high. Peter wriggled through a thin gap between two mounds of cut trunks, kicked aside a scattering of leaves, and removed strips of bark where several larger logs had been piled on top of each other. Beneath the makeshift panel, where three or four tree trunks rested together, was a small space just big enough for a boy of Tibors size.Do you think you could stay here a whole night? Peter asked.Tibor nodded. He knew that the only acceptable answer was yes, even though the idea of hiding inside of the woodpile scared him.The log pile was a short walk from a garbage dump that backed up to the kitchen and close to a cabin where the officers took their meals. The cooks received regular deliveries of fresh vegetables, meat, and poultry, although none of that went to the workforce. While SS and guards picked over large platters of sausages and cheeses, prisoners were always fed the same gruel. They werent offered as much as a scrap from the abundant plates of leftovers.After dinner each evening, the kitchen crew carried the days garbage to the dump and dropped it all into large oil drums. Every few days, gas was poured into those drums and set afire. But until the fire was lit, the waste and uneaten food just sat inside of the drums and rotted.Peter figured that some evenings, before the work detail ended, they could smuggle Tibor into this small compartment. No one knew about it because Karl and Peter had carved it out in secret. If Tibor were to stay there all night, there were bound to be times when no one was around, and he would be able to forage through the garbage.Yes, it was risky, and there was no telling what would happen if Tibor was discovered, but he had proven his capacity for stealth before, and Peter and Karl promised to do their best to cover for him. Most important, and what no one needed to say, was that none of them could remember the last time that their stomachs were full. Tibor agreed.On his first night in the hiding place, Tibor was too afraid to venture outside of the space. He lay tightly curled up, barely slept, and struggled not to sneeze or cough. The next night, though, he quietly pushed out the strips of bark, crawled outside, and found a perch where he could watch the guards. Peter was right: they regularly patrolled the kitchen and tents, but generally steered clear of the dump.While he waited for the new moon, Tibor developed the ideal route in his mind. Soon he knew it so well that he could close his eyes and see it in detail. Finally the night arrived when it was so dark that he could barely make out the kitchen. He crept from his hiding spot and bounded to the oil drums like a jackrabbit.Keeping an eye out for guards, Tibor snaked one hand into the mass of garbage, seized a half-eaten apple, and sank his teeth into it. Its sweetness and crisp texture almost exploded in his mouth. Before the sensation could fade, he retrieved scraps of meat, carrot tops, crusts of bread, and bits of radish. He gobbled as much as he could, then sprinted back to his hiding space, where, exhausted, he fell into a deep and satisfying sleep. He was still asleep when Peter gently rapped against the wood panel the next morning.Tibor came away from that first trip to the cans empty-handed. He had wanted to snag something for his friends, but hadnt dared: while it was one thing to be caught crawling around the camp unsupervised, it would be another thing entirely to be found with food in his pockets.Soon, however, his raids on the dump became all but routine. One or more of the men escorted him to the log pile at dusk, then returned for him the following morning. The men were always careful to post a lookout, and Tibor soon learned when to venture out and when to stay put. If there was too much moonlight or any kind of commotion, he elected to remain in the compartment all night long. But when it was dark or foggy, or once a guard had passed through the far side of the camp, he scurried to the garbage and quickly scarfed down as much as he could. He rarely dared to stay for more than a minute, but on June 19, he lingered longer, digging deep into several cans until he had scrounged enough scraps and remains to fill his belly. It was his fourteenth birthday.Tibor soon grew confident of his ability to elude the guards and began to stash stolen food inside of his coat and pants. He took pride in gifting his friends with fresh vegetables or half slices of real bread. As he grew even bolder, he tightened the cuffs of his shirtsleeves and pants and filled them with as much as they could hold.As the late-night raids became more of an adventure, Tibor started to think of himself as the camp rat. It seemed to him that a rat was quick, silent, and limber. He was constantly vigilant, and kept to a set path that he knew was safe. Because he was cunning, the rat always managed to scavenge enough to eat, so he grew a thick and healthy coat that kept him warm in winter. He could live side by side with his enemies without their ever knowing that he existed.Tibor even took pride in thinking like a rat. That was why, when the watchtower became equipped with lights that could beam into all corners of the camp, he gave up his nighttime adventures. Tibor was a smart rat. Survival was much more important to him than a full stomach.3Tibor and his companions were returned to Mauthausen in November, after more than five months in the forest. They had completed the barracks project exactly as promised and to the apparent satisfaction of the camp commanders. They had actually finished the job ahead of schedule. Now they wondered why they were being sent back to the terrible prison on the hill. Were there no more tasks for them? And what about the war?They had not been privy to any news during their time away from Mauthausen. None of the workers had a clue about the state of the world beyond the work site, but Peter sensed that conditions were worsening for the Nazis. Since early October, the SS seemed increasingly desperate to speed up the work. There were more beatings and senseless shootings. As the command increased the pace of work, accidents happened more often. It seemed like every few days a laborer was dragged dead from the tunnel.Three of the seven Poles, including Karl, had been transferred to another camp, and nobody knew why. The other four, including Peter, were pestered by persistent chest infections or minor injuries that turned into running sores for lack of proper treatment. Still, the four men and Tibor were fortunate: a Polish kapo who had struck up an acquaintance with Peter

and his friends put them onto a truck headed back to the fort when the job was finished, unlike so many others who were forced to leave the camp on foot.It was already winter when Tibor returned to the Mauthausen hill. A blanket of heavy clouds hung so low in the sky that they seemed to cushion the forts two massive guard towers. A hundred yards from the gates, just behind the goalposts of a crudely marked-off soccer field, Tibor spotted what looked like stacks of white tree limbs half covered with snow. The several neatly arranged mounds stretched in a line from one side of the end zone to the other. At first, Tibor thought that they might be logs for the crematorium. But that seemed out of placethere were no trees within sight of the prisonthe immediate area had been cleared to make room for another camp. But as the truck moved closer, Tibor recognized the crowns as human heads, the stems below them frozen torsos and limbs.It soon became evident to Tibor that while he was away, life in the barracks had become more severe. Aron was gone, along with most of the other familiar faces. Vast numbers of Hungarians had been added to the barracks, and every berth was filled to bursting. Men couldnt turn over without touching one another.Inspection of prisoners in the massive plaza.United States Holocaust Memorial Museum It was far colder, and yet Tibor and his friends were still made to strip naked for delousing. Officers lined them up and forced them to jump into a huge vat of disinfectant that burned Tibors eyes and nose. When he didnt immerse his head, a kapo with massive hands grabbed his skull and held him underwater until he felt his lungs about to burst.Because Tibor was one of the healthier residents in his block, he was assigned to a work crew that traveled around the camp emptying latrines. One day, unexpectedly, his cart took a route that stopped above the massive pit that Aron had described. It was a rock quarry, the biggest one Tibor had ever seen. While workers dragged pails of human waste up from the quarry floor, the kapo in charge permitted Tibor to move closer to the lip of the pit.He hesitated before looking. After the Poles had seen the quarry they had refused to talk about it. Aron had chattered about it endlessly, but the way he laughed when he mentioned parachuting made Tibor a little queasy. But once Tibor was standing on the bluff that overlooked it, there was no turning away.The dreaded rock quarry.United States Holocaust Memorial MuseumThe sight was at once riveting and shameful. Easily a thousand rickety figures in rags strained deep in a cavernous hole in the earth. Half of them hammered, picked, and chiseled blocks of granite out of the walls and floors, while the other half loaded the jagged blocks onto their backs and hauled them up a steep staircase at least a hundred feet high. The landing in front of the incline was dotted with red stains. Tibor was quick to realize why they called them the steps of death.The work seemed never to stop. The kapos arranged men in lines of four, one after another, then prodded them up the stairs like a team of mules. Their backs bent at ninety-degree angles as they took one agonized step after another. The poor creatures were lined up so precariously close to one another that if one man fell or dropped his load, he could send a dozen others tumbling like dominoes.Tibor had never seen so much misery in one place. The kapos wielded their truncheons like whips, slapping at shoulders and backs the way Tibor imagined the Egyptian slave masters had whipped the Jews who built the pyramids.Now Tibor understood why Arons eyes grew wide when he talked about the quarry. The cruelty was unspeakable. The only thing that mattered was the clockworklike movement of cutting and hauling, which continued even when a man collapsed under his burden. And yet Tibor couldnt veer away from it. Each time that his cart stopped to reload, he returned to stare into the hole a little longer.If God had freed the children of Israel from their oppressors in Egypt, why had He not done the same for the slaves of Mauthausen? Had these Poles and Greeks and Spaniards and Russians not served long and hard enough to deserve the same mercy? Most of them werent Jews, but did that make them less worthy of freedom? Had they not suffered long or hard enough? Were they fated to serve centuries under the whip, like the ancient Hebrews, before the Almighty sent a man like Moses to lead them out of bondage? Tibor puzzled over the problem but had no answer for it.