



Survivor's Game (Holocaust - World War II)

David Karmi

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TEENAGER IN THE DEATH CAMPS

Some people have a knack for survival, for getting out of jams. Twelve-year-old David Karmi, a master of the art, is about to be put to the ultimate test.

War has consumed the world and David finds himself in the middle of a human slaughter on a planetary scale. Whole towns are vaporized. Cities obliterated in firestorms. More than fifty million people will die—twelve million either gassed, shot, hanged, worked to death or subjected to biological experiments.

And now David's luck has finally run out. Having already endured one horrifying deportation, he and his family are rounded up for the second time and forced onto a train that will bring them all to the very heart of the Nazi extermination machine.

Separated from his parents and siblings, the teenager is hurled into a nightmare of death camps, forced marches, sickness, violence and depravity. On his own, through the torturous months that follow, David endures Auschwitz, Dachau, and the Warsaw ghetto.

Though he's just a kid, David will try to stay alive by his wits and instincts, taking terrifying chances, making split-second decisions, and learning the tricks and techniques of survival. But time is running out. His only hope is that the Nazis will be defeated and the American soldiers will free him—and his family—before it's too late.

"[Karmi's debut forgoes] the despair employed by Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, instead echoing the optimism of Anne Frank...Eminently readable and largely remarkable."
—Kirkus Reviews

"'Some people have a knack for survival, for getting out of jams.' Karmi is one of those, and he faces the ultimate test as a young teen in Nazi-occupied Europe as he and his family are deported to Auschwitz."
—Publishers Weekly

"Survivor's Game reads not so much like a memoir but a novel, replete with tension, drama, and twists and turns. Recommended."
—Midwest Book Review

"This is a story we all need to know...the cost of forgetting is too high."
—New York Times best-selling author Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff

Survivor's Game (Holocaust - World War II) Details

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From Reader Review Survivor's Game (Holocaust - World War II) for online ebook

Lisa Kearns says

I received this book directly from the author/publisher in exchange for writing a review of it.

From the time I opened this book until I turned the last page, I was drawn deeply into David Karmi's story. I've known two Holocaust survivors in my lifetime, and both of them avoided talking about the horrors they experienced. I wanted to ask questions, but I also respected that they didn't want to relive the suffering and loss. David tells his story as a lesson and a warning to generations for whom the Holocaust is just a chapter in history books. He doesn't sugar-coat or hint - he shocks and disgusts the reader with a true account of what went on.

He takes the reader by the hand and leads them from his happy boyhood in Hungary to his family's exile in Poland and eventually to the concentration camps where his parents were murdered. He was only 14 at the time, although he told his captors he was 18, knowing that his value as a worker in the field would save his life. He suffered starvation and bone chilling cold, staggered through forced marches between camps, and watched hundreds of men die from beatings, shooting, exposure, and broken spirits. Others simply disappeared to the gas chambers, where he watched the smoke of their incinerated bodies rising into the air.

David somehow survived years of captivity, but he never gave up or lost hope. I cried several times as I read the horrible, unimaginable things done to these people. To have seen this side of humanity at such a young age would cause most of us to be deeply traumatized for life, but David's optimism and willingness to forgive helped his soul heal.

After the Germans surrendered and he was liberated from the camps, David went to look for his family and friends, but found that almost everyone he knew had been killed. He made his way to Palestine and lived for several years in an orphanage (kibbutz), and fought with the Israeli army for the liberation of Israel.

Eventually he married and made his way to the USA, where he became a successful real estate developer. To have survived his past, arrived in a new country with just a few dollars in his pocket and to have become so successful is a testament to his spirit and determination.

I loved this book - as much as one can love reading about someone else's suffering. I think it should be required high school reading, so that that shameful part of history doesn't just fade away with time. My 13 year old son is currently reading this book, and he is amazed by what his school history books haven't mentioned about the Holocaust.

John Young says

An amazing story of resilience, but the writing was drab, and the author got bogged down in details at times. Still, a worthwhile read.

Ruby Tuesday says

I've read countless Holocaust Memoirs, and I enjoyed the first 3/4's of the book, however it does lose steam in the last quarter.

The author describes himself as a Zionist and speaks of his pride in the state of Israel. He also talks about the Holocaust and how it must never happen again. I would like to have heard him speak of the Arab population in Palestine prior to 1948. Those that fled the country in fear of their lives and have never been able to return. As a victim of the Holocaust, I wanted to hear his thoughts on this matter. Because he didn't mention it seemed to me that his main concern was that the Jewish people had their own state and that anybody who lost their home or lives were just collateral damage unworthy of a mention.

This is from a man that had been expelled from Budapest to Poland before illegally crossing the border back to Poland, deported to Auschwitz where he narrowly missed the gas chambers, Dachau, Landsberg and survived a death march where he was liberated.

After the war he travelled to Italy where he boarded a ship to try and illegally enter Palestine. His boat was turned back, and he was in a displaced persons camp in Cyprus before eventually being able to legally travel to Palestine. David Karmi lost Uncles, Aunts, his parents and some siblings. His bravery cannot be doubted, he knows more than any of us how it feels to be a refugee, to have no homeland and to lose family members in tragic circumstances. It's for this reason that for me the booking was lacking. After all he's endured, what are his thoughts and feelings that the Jewish people's victory was the Palestinian people's catastrophe? If he had addressed this subject, honestly when talking about his Zionist beliefs I would have had greater optimism for the future.

I started the book rooting for the author but by the end, I felt disappointed.

Ira Therebel says

This is a memoir of a Holocaust survivor David Karmi. In this book he takes us through his life starting with the happy days of his early childhood in a large Jewish family through the times when it started to change and the animosity began and grew into the discrimination that went over to the concentration camps and Holocaust which he managed to survive as a teenager and his life afterwards in Israel and America.

Those books are always an interesting read as it gives one a look into one of the darkest parts of human history. So is this one. David is really good at describing the times he spend in the concentration camps and there are moments that where one gets to see the details that are absolutely cringing as well as times when he was supposed to die and yet survived either because of his own actions based on intuition or a sort of luck based on decisions of the ones who were pretty much in control of his life. We see the times that open up some things he didn't know for him, such as his conversation with the German political prisoner Hans and played a role in his survival.

Usually such books end with the liberation, a sort of "happy end" for the survivor. But this book goes on to what happened to him after it. Here is where it stumbles a little. While his life was still extraordinary the narration loses a bit of its power. It is understandable as there is sure a different dynamics between the horror of Holocaust and the more normal life that came after. But at some parts, especially after leaving the

military, the book just feels as listing of events without actual emotion in it. Still it was pretty interesting to read about his experience with the beginning of Israel, when he got there it was still Palestine. It is especially interesting considering current events. David proclaims himself as a Zionist. Today there is a big criticism towards it in the population. I am neutral on the issue as I feel it is a very complicated topic and I don't know enough and what people on either side feel seems to be justifiable. At the same time I often see people criticize people who worked on creating Israel for entering Palestine. But here we see one of the people who came then and fought for it. And it is impossible not to understand the people who back then survived all the discrimination they went through all their life not wanting to live in countries that mistreated them for simply being Jewish and be happy for finally having a place they felt was their home they belonged to.

It is also great to see David describe his attitude and what he thinks made him survive. He kept on hoping without giving up. And there is a great thought from him in the afterword where he says that "hate is just another way to hurt yourself for what somebody has done to you". This is when he describes why he didn't have animosity towards Germans or any wish for revenge. Wise words from somebody who had more reason to feel hate than many of us ever will.

I got this book for free through giveaways in exchange for an honest review

Wendy says

I have read many books about the Holocaust and I will continue to do so as I think it is too important to not let us forget what happened to millions of people during WW2.

This story tells of a teenage Jewish boy, born into a happy and loving family in Hungary and their persecution for just being Jewish. The author wrote from his heart as he remembered the details of his childhood and the misery he endured in the death camps. Using his wits and his positive outlook he managed to survive.

Most Holocaust books end when the war ends, but the author continues with his story on what happened next. The author then describes his life in the military in Palestine and how he eventually immigrated to the USA. I found the first half of his life truly remarkable and his writing was so full of emotion. However, from Palestine to the USA, the story became rather dry as if he was just listing facts. A thoroughly interesting and remarkable story and I highly recommend it. One unique thing about David Karmi is his attitude towards life. He has no room for hatred or revenge or despair but lives his life to the full and tries to always be optimistic and happy.

Marina says

I really liked the book Survivor's games by David Karmi. It is through the eyes of a teenage boy who survives the Holocaust. The writer, David Karmi, is the one who actually survived the Holocaust and this is his story of survival.

David is born into a Jewish family in Transylvania, Hungary. His family is deported because he is Jewish and his father is from Poland. They are squished into a small train box with many other deportees for days without food and water. When they finally get where they are going, a death camp, he and his family are separated into different lines. First the Nazis separate boys and girls and then when they are separated

whether they are healthy, young and fit or not. David lies about his age because he is scared that if he gets sent into the other line, it will lead to death.

David is separated from every member of his family and is sent to the death camp, Aushwitz, by himself. David is about the youngest out of everybody in the group. One day the Nazi's pick out the younger boys in the group and tell them that they are going to deport them for a better living area because they are young. Not believing them, because all the lies they have already told them, David secretly slips back into the big group of men, but the next day they take role and there are 1,001 prisoners. The Nazi yell and scream at the prisoner trying to figure out who the extra person is, David. Finally, they just shot one of the other prisoners to keep an even number.

After some months David is moved to another death camp in Warsaw. Then he walks a death march, where many prisoners die of starvation, disease and sickness and goes through another death camp where is treated better because he works for Lieutenant Werner. Lieutenant treats David like he is an actual human being, instead of like the other camp where they were treated like animals. The Lieutenant and David become friends and sometimes the Lieutenant even takes David out of the camp to go eat dinner with him and his family. David starts to notice that Lieutenant starts drinking heavily because the German are losing the war. Then the prisoners are taken to another death march where they walk for weeks. Then one day the prisoners wake up and find the Nazi's have ditched their clothes and ran away. Then an American tank comes and take the prisoners to safety.

After the war David tries to reunite with his family, but finds out that many of his siblings and his mother and father were killed. He goes on with his life and starts a very successful landlord and get married and has a family. Then his partner that does landlords together dies and him and his wife get in a divorce. Then he remarries and he get a new partner in landlord and is still alive today!!!

It is really hard to choose certain things to put in here because it is such a good book with some much detail. If anyone want to read an amazing world war 2 book, read Survivor's Game.

Larry D.C. says

Survivor's Game is the first-hand account of the Holocaust seen through the pre-teen eyes of David Karmi, a Hungarian Jew. Karmi narrates his seemingly endless horrific personal experiences of three death camps and two death marches. The disbelief he encounters from friends and relatives when he returns to his native city of Satu Mare in Hungary after his family is expelled and left for dead in the middle of the Polish countryside are indicative of the widespread denial that people are capable of being so cruel just because of differing religious beliefs or nationalities. Has anything changed in this regard? Bosnia? Africa?

Karmi's intelligence, courage, wit, and his unwillingness to give up hope, plus a lot of luck, carry him through all the atrocities to a free and successful life in Palestine and New York. Yet in the midst of all these terrible events, touching moments of human kindness and generosity actually do occur. In spite of the difficult subject matter, Survivor's game is an engaging read and a reminder of the indelibility of the human spirit. It's also a reminder that such events can easily happen again.

Grady says

Number 87672

David Karmi has written a rather extraordinary book. Though the book is a memoir of his experiences as a Jewish lad who survived the Holocaust, there are several aspects of SURVIVOR'S GAME that make it unique among the many books about this subject. First, Karmi writes with exquisite prose, a fact that takes the reader beyond the facts at hand and allows visualization of the beauties of the Hungarian and Polish countryside, the joys of family life, and the interaction between those friends both young and old that he meets throughout his journey. Second, he documents with maps and time frames the actual events of the Nazi rise to power and destruction of the lives of so many people in Hitler's wildly insane perception of the Third Reich. But the most important aspect of Karmi's writing begins in his choice of the title for this book: without being jocular or making light of a hideous moment in history and the suffering he and his family endured Karmi consistently 'plays the game' of survival, taking incredible chances, thinking ahead, always maintaining 'bargaining resources' in his pocket to find food and safety and always coming out with an optimist's attitude - and that attitude is the reason for his survival of the great game of living despite the horror!

At the age of twelve Karmi's world begins to disintegrate as he is moved from his birthplace in Halmi, Transylvania (a part of Romania) where he was the late son of a couple who felt their family of children was complete (he gained the nickname of 'leftover') to other parts of Hungary. David's father was Polish born, his mother was Hungarian, and he spoke five languages - Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, Hungarian and German - a fact that was to assist his surviving future travails. The Nazi occupation grew and David's family made many moves. Karmi provides maps both Pre-Liberation and Post-Liberation location maps that give the reader a fine sense of the atmosphere and physical presence of this story: Hungary to Poland to Hungary to Auschwitz to Warsaw to Dachau to Landsberg, Austria and then with some retracing of steps after the Allied Forces liberated his country eventually heading toward Palestine/Israel and the United States.

Through David Karmi's eyes we witness the savagery of the concentration camps, ghettos, and crematoria that he survived, being assigned merely the number 87672 instead of recognizing his humanity as a person. But while most people have read or heard about the places and conditions the Jews were subjected to during the Holocaust, Karmi takes the time to embellish our knowledge: 'Auschwitz was a prison to more than just Jews. The barracks were segregated. Some held German criminals. Some held gypsies, or the handicapped, or homosexuals - any groups singled out for ethnic cleansing. There was little if any mingling between different types of prisoners, though we sometimes spoke to one another in the yard. Anyone moving too close to the fence was shot. At times, a prisoner would just turn toward the fence and start walking - those too weak, too hungry, too sick or too terrified to go on. To commit suicide, all you had to do was make a move of any sort toward that boundary. There was no warning.'

But the manner in which David Karmi survived all of this and finally ends up in the US as a successful businessman is the resolution of this book. The last portion of the novel is not as tightly woven as the first - but that may be due to the stretching of our interest in the commentary about success. Still, this is a book that is stunning to read - both as a testimony to survival and as a factual history of WW II.

Grady Harp

Nicky Hirst says

I've had this book for a while, waiting for the right time to read it. I knew it wasn't the type of book you read on holiday, on a train or in the ad break, owing to the subject matter it covered.

This book read more like a novel than an eye witness account, and unfortunately lost some pace about two thirds in. Nevertheless, it is an interesting read and inspiring to see how the author dealt with such a terrible time in our history and how he survived by using his wits and will power.

It is a book worth recommending and although I was given it for free through Goodreads It is one I would have happily have paid for as David Karmi's memoirs are absorbing and provide further insight into the awful reality of World War II for ordinary people without any trace of the Hollywood treatment.

The book appears to be an accurate recollection and a very worthwhile read. There have been better books on the Holocaust but this one contains a different DNA throughout with the author's core value being one of never holding things against people, no matter how great their crime as you will be the one that misses out. The philosophy has served him well throughout the Holocaust to his success in America.

Belinda Pearson says

great memoir, worth the listen on Audio

Pam says

Survivor's Game is by David Karmi. It is the story of his survival during the Holocaust. It is easy to read and gives a lot of information.

David lived in Hungary with his father, mother, and four brothers and three sisters. David was the youngest. He is from an Orthodox family. His brother Moses was especially religious. Father made a good living but worked all the time. He taught David the importance of having and keeping money. David was never afraid to stand up for himself and his friends. Because his father was born in Poland, the entire family was deported back to Poland. Although David spoke five languages, Polish was not one of them. The family struggled and was finally deported again. This time to death.

David managed to survive by using his wits. He would do almost anything to live. He survived the Warsaw Ghetto, several camps, and two death marches. After liberation, he went to Palestine and helped create the state of Israel. He then came to the US to figure out what to do next. He worked in construction and over the years has helped out other survivors.

His story is an inspiration to others.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'Being an optimist helped me to endure and overcome the unbearable suffering of the Holocaust.'

In 1928, David Karmi was born into a Jewish family in the (then) Romanian town of Halmi. David was the youngest of nine siblings. When he was six, his family relocated to the (then) Hungarian city of Satu Mare. During this time, Hungary became increasingly hostile to its Jewish population, and once Hitler rose to power in Germany this hostility became official policy. Even though David's father, Gabriel, had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army during World War I, the family was expelled to Poland. After unsuccessfully seeking to stay with relatives, the Karmis return to Satu Mare at great risk – only to find themselves

dispossessed of their home and belongings. The family is again deported – to Auschwitz – where David, aged 12, is separated from his family.

‘The deportation of the Jews from Hungary was performed with lethal precision. Over 600,000 people were loaded onto the trains to Auschwitz in a matter of only a couple of months. Most of them died.’

David survives Auschwitz, as well as a concentration camp in the Warsaw ghetto, and Dachau, before being liberated by the Americans at the Landsberg concentration camp. In this book he writes of his experiences and how he survived. David Karmi’s memoir is an extraordinary story of courage, planning, resourcefulness and occasional serendipity. David Karmi’s story does not end with his liberation: he writes of his experiences in Palestine and then in America.

‘You had to believe that you would get through it in the end, and that there would be another life waiting for you in a place where the world had not gone insane.’

What makes this account remarkable? Most of us currently alive in the world were born after World War II. Our knowledge of the events of that War is indirect and for many of us, our relatives who were directly involved never spoke of their experiences. David Karmi’s account is a first person account from the perspective of a child who experienced great loss and terrible hardship but somehow never gave up hope. As an old man, Hans, told him in Auschwitz:

‘Those who do not remain strong become smoke.’

David remained strong.

‘I feel today as I felt when I was liberated. I still have no animosity toward anyone.’

Many of us would find David’s lack of animosity both refreshing and surprising. His story is well worth reading, and sharing. It is important that we remember the lessons of the past, and try to learn from them.

Note: I was offered, and accepted, a copy of this book for review purposes.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Terri says

This memoir of the author's, David Karmi's, life is written with simplicity and depth.

"The entire group was in shock. Some still cried or rocked back and forth in endless prayers. The air was heavy with despair. For me, it was like walking from childhood into a nightmare adult world."

One day David is contemplating the purchase of his very own violin with money he carefully saved, and how he would learn to play it well; and the next day he and his family are suddenly deported from their home because his father is Polish. In two hours the family must pack what precious little they can in 2 small valises and be gone. After 3 grueling days without food, water and barely room to breathe, the entire train is dumped

in a field to fend for themselves against the angry, hate filled Ukrainians.

This is now David's life and the life of his family. It is once again, sad to remember through yet another account of the absolute hatred that lives in the hearts of men, the willingness to turn their backs on humanity because of such a hatred.

"I stared at the man. I did not know what to say. It couldn't be true, that men and women were burned. For what? For being Jewish? It was not possible that this could happen that men could do this to other men. Yet there was smoke."

David Karmi is able to capture in his story, the thoughts and experiences of David as a young boy going through this horror- the shock that this world is now his, the desire to live, the creative ways he seeks food and survival- and that such a little boy should have to endure this is heart wrenching.

I was captivated by Karmi's story... until he commenced to wrap it up for much too long. A good editor would have caught that and made the ending much better.

Judi Byrd says

Great book written in a straightforward way.

I liked the quick moving, easy to understand and readability of how the Jews were treated during World War 2. This was truly written from David Mark's heart.

Sophie says

It was frustrating not having a sense of time - he didn't even say what year he was born. And during the war years it would have been helpful to know what year it was, and at least what season (if he didn't know the month) to give the reader a better understanding of the passage of time and the environment.

I feel bad giving a 2 star review to someone's survival story, but it didn't add to my understanding of the holocaust.
