

Michael Neuhauser

Title: *A Message to Eternity*

Author: Michael Neuhauser

Publisher: Monash University Print Services

Place of Publication: Caulfield East, VIC.

Year of Publication: 2007

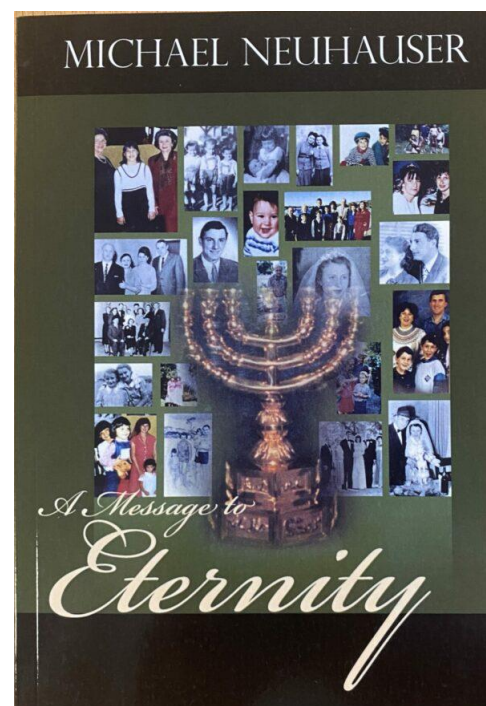
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library and Sydney Jewish Museum.

Cities/towns/camps: Slovakia: Košice, Marienbad; Poland: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Kittlitztreben forced labour camp; Legnica, Kotzenau, Haynau; Australia: Melbourne.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative

Genre: Memoirs

Key events/experiences: concentration camp



A Message to Eternity is the 347-page memoir of Slovakian survivor Michael (Miklós) Neuhauser, who was deported to Auschwitz in 1944 and imprisoned in several concentration camps before his liberation in 1945.

Pages 1-73 give an account of his childhood and family life in Košice and the onset of Hungarian rule. Pages 74-96 describe his internment in Auschwitz and Kittlitztreben in 1944. Pages 97-127 recount liberation, his return to Czechoslovakia and emigration preparations. Pages 128-57 cover his early years in Australia, marriage, and family. Pages 170-99 outline his later life. Pages 200-66 offer reflections on various topics from politics, history, religion and science. Pages 267-347 are a collection of memorable incidents, observations, and recollections.

Miklos (Michael) Neuhauser was born on 5 January 1929 in Košice, Czechoslovakia (modern-day Slovakia), to Rivka (Irma) Braun and Abraham (Adolf) Neuhauser. He grew up in a large Orthodox Jewish family with four sisters – Vera, Leah, Olga, and Erika – and two brothers, Viktor and Robert. His father was a successful oil trader. Michael attended a secular school and also received a Jewish education at Cheder.

In November 1938, Košice was annexed by Hungary. Hungarian troops occupied the city, introducing antisemitic quotas and spreading propaganda. During the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 rations were imposed. Michael's father was conscripted into the Hungarian forced labour service, but was eventually released.

On 19 March 1944, when Michael was just fifteen, German troops occupied Hungary and Košice fell under Nazi control. The Jews of Košice were forced to wear the Star of David, and within six weeks they were rounded up and interned in the local brickworks

under Hungarian guard. After two weeks confinement, the Neuhauser family was deported in crowded cattle wagons to Auschwitz where Michael's mother and younger siblings Robert and Erika – aged twelve and ten – were murdered on arrival. Michael, his father Abraham and brother Viktor survived selection. However, Viktor was soon selected for a forced labour detail and was never seen again; he reportedly perished in Melk.

Michael, his father and cousin Nandor, were also selected for a forced labour transport and sent to Kittlitztreben, a sub-camp of Gross-Rosen guarded by Luftwaffe personnel. Deep in the forest, the prisoners were first put to work clearing woodland. They then performed back-break labour in various areas of the huge Luftwaffe construction project - lumbering, mixing cement, laying railway tracks, and building concrete roads, ammunition depots, and barracks. Michael served in transport commandos hauling timber and stacking ammunition crates in depot bunkers.

Although conditions were less lethal than at Auschwitz-Birkenau, life at Kittlitztreben was marked by starvation, beatings, and exposure. Prisoners searched for food in nearby fields and many succumbed to illness and exhaustion. As food rations dwindled, Michael was able to scavenge sugar beets during work details.

Fluent in German, his father Abraham was given clerical duties that spared him from hard labour. However, ill health and a stomach ulcer weakened him. Luckily, through connections with the camp administration, he secured a bed in the remedial block for weakened prisoners. Later, as they grew weak from hard-labour, Abraham arranged a bed for Michael and Nandor in the remedial block. A devoutly religious man, Abraham secretly acquired tefillin and a Hebrew copy of Exodus, which they read in secret and prayed to gain physical and spiritual strength.

In January 1945, as the Soviet army advanced, preparations were made to evacuate the camp. While most prisoners were sent on a death march, Michael, Abraham, and Nandor remained behind and were liberated by the Red Army on 10 February 1945.

A few days later, the Neuhausers left the camp. Attempting to return to Košice, they set out on foot, sheltering in abandoned houses and relying on the goodwill of villagers. A few days into their journey, they were captured by Soviet soldiers, classified as “undesirable aliens,” and forced to work on a farm hauling manure for long hours alongside captive German civilians.

After a week of forced labour they were released and permitted to return to Czechoslovakia. Begging for food from locals, and enduring constant harassment from Soviet soldiers, they travelled to Kotzenau and then to Haynau, where they learned of a repatriation train departing from Liegnitz.

Arriving in Košice in late April, Michael was reunited with his three surviving sisters. Seeking to rebuild, he moved to Mariánské Lázně and enrolled in a Talmudic school established for survivors, then decided to become a dental technician and secured an apprenticeship.

Following the communist takeover, Michael's sister managed to secure Australian landing permits from a friend. The Neuhauser family escaped to Vienna in 1949.

Michael and his father sheltered in a refugee hostel for five months in the British zone while awaiting landing permits. With assistance from a Jewish charity, they travelled to Genoa where they boarded the *SS Cyrenia*, arriving in Australia in October 1949.

In Melbourne, Michael secured work at a dental hospital. In 1952, he married Rachel and they had two daughters, Dianne and Pauline.

A Message to Eternity is a reflective and wide-ranging autobiography of the author's life and wartime experiences. It presents a portrait of Jewish life in Košice before and after the war, with particular attention to the practice of Orthodox Judaism and the evolution of the author's faith. While the memoir gives only brief reference to Auschwitz and Mauthausen, it provides a fuller account of his imprisonment in Kittlitztreben and the challenges of life after liberation. Written in a stream of consciousness style, the narrative is not limited to the author's personal experiences, and often alternates between witness testimony and ruminations on faith, science, politics, and history. The chronology is often fragmented and some biographical details are vague or missing. .