

Magda Hellinger Blau and Maya Lee

Title: *The Nazis Knew My Name: A Remarkable Story of Survival and Courage in Auschwitz*

Author: Magda Hellinger & Maya Lee with David Brewster

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Australia

Place of Publication: Cammeray, NSW

Year of Publication: 2021

Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Sydney Jewish Museum and most public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Czechoslovakia: Michalovce, Prague, Jiříkov; Poland: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau; Germany: Ravensbrück and Malchow concentration camps; Australia: Melbourne.

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

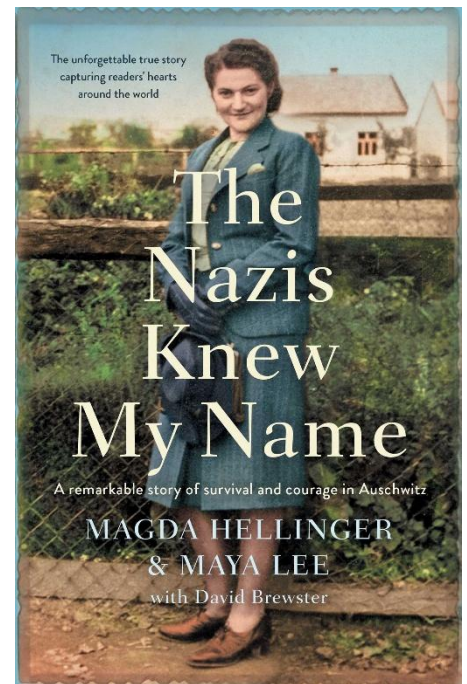
Genre: Memoirs

Key events/experiences: concentration camp; prisoner-functionary; death march.

The Nazis Knew My Name is the expanded 304-page biography of Magda Hellinger Blau. It was co-authored with her daughter Maya Lee, who posthumously edited her mother's original memoir *From Childhood to Auschwitz Birkenau* for commercial publication by Simon & Schuster in 2021.

Pages 1-34 briefly recount Magda's childhood and early life in pre-war Michalovce, before describing her deportation to Auschwitz in March 1942. Pages 35-50 cover her induction and four-month imprisonment in Auschwitz I. Pages 51-120 describe her transfer to Birkenau and 'promotion' to *Blockälteste* in 1943, outlining her responsibilities as block leader in several barracks across the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. Pages 121-202 recount her experiences as Camp Elder (*Lagerälteste*) from May 1944 until January 1945, including her interactions with key SS figures Irma Grese, Josef Kramer, and others. Pages 203-36 describe the evacuation of Auschwitz, the death march to Ravensbrück and Malchow, liberation in May 1945, and her return to Michalovce. Pages 237-304, written by Maya Lee, trace the family's post-war emigration to Israel and later Australia. This section also reflects on the legacy of prisoner-functionaries, addresses accusations levelled against Magda in the post-war period, and includes an appendix with photographs.

Magda Blau (nee Hellinger) was born 19 August 1916 in the Slovakian town of Michalovce, the second child and only daughter in a family of five children born to parents Ignac and Berta Hellinger. Blau was deported from Slovakia to Auschwitz-Birkenau in March 1942 on one of the first transports of Jewish women. Due in part to



her fluency in German, Magda was forced to serve in a succession of prisoner-functionary roles. Rising from *Stubendienst* to *Blockälteste* and eventually *Lagerälteste* of Camp C, she remained in Auschwitz until its evacuation in January 1945. After surviving the death march, she was liberated in May 1945 and returned to Michalovce, where she married Béla Blau. For a more detailed summary of her experiences, see the entry for Magda's first memoir, *From Childhood to Auschwitz Birkenau*.

After the war, the Blau's opened a haberdashery shop. Their first daughter, Maya Lee, was born 5 July 1946 in the town of Jiříkov. Their second-daughter Eva was born in December 1947. As their business began to thrive Czechoslovakia fell under Communist rule. Bela was pressured to join the Communist Party but refused, and as a result the family business was confiscated. After Israel achieved independence the family escaped Communist rule and settled in Israel where Magda worked as a kindergarten teacher. At the urging of relatives in Australia, they secured landing permits in 1956 and relocated to Melbourne.

In 2003, at age 87, Magda privately wrote and self-published an account of her experiences titled *From Childhood to Auschwitz Birkenau*. She also gave various audiovisual testimonies, archived in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, USC Shoah Foundation and in the Holocaust Centre in Melbourne. In 2006, Magda died, aged 89.

After her death, Maya Lee embarked on additional research, reading survivor accounts and listening to her mother's testimonies. Realising that Magda had left out many details of her story, including testimonies from fellow Auschwitz survivors to corroborate Magda's account, Maya enlisted editor David Brewster to polish and expand Magda's memoir. This version was published in 2012 by commercial publisher Simon and Schuster, Australia.

The Nazis Knew My Name is more comprehensive than Magda's original relatively sparse narrative, providing additional detail and historical context drawn from her audiovisual testimonies and Maya Lee's research. While Maya Lee provides the introduction, concluding chapters, and contextual commentary, the central narrative remains grounded in Magda's own voice. Lee's contributions also sensitively examine the role of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoner-functionaries, addressing accusations of collaboration raised against Magda in the post-war period. Drawing on testimonies from numerous survivors – including Dr Gisela Perl – the memoir situates these claims within the broader realities of camp life and the responsibilities imposed upon prisoner-functionaries. The memoir also combines first and second-generation perspective, with Maya Lee reflecting on her childhood as a daughter of survivors and the lasting legacy of the Holocaust.