

Dita Gould

Title: *The Girl in the Lion's Mouth: Memoir of a Child Survivor of the Holocaust*

Author: Dita Gould

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

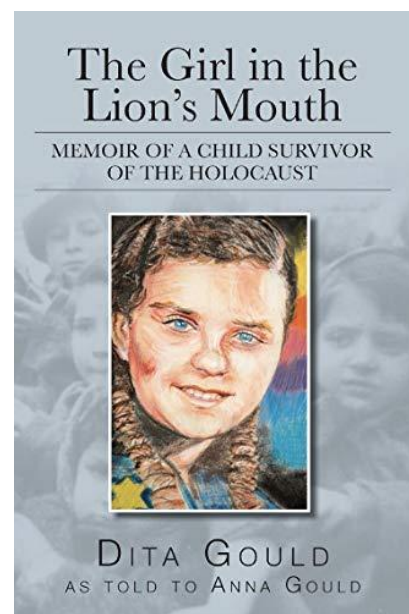
Cities/towns/camps: Austria: Vienna; Slovakia:

Dunaszerdahely, Bratislava; Hungary: Budapest; Switzerland; Zurich; France: Paris; Australia: Sydney, Melbourne.

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

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: child survivor; in-hiding; ghetto.



The Girl in the Lion's Mouth is the story of Hungarian child survivor, Dita Gould. After eleven-year-old Dita and her younger sister were separated from their parents, they survived by hiding in various locations, including a most unlikely place – the SS headquarters in Budapest.

The memoir is 222 pages long. Pages 1-22 describe the author's family and childhood. Pages 23-42 recount the Nazi occupation of Hungary in 1944 and Dita's time in hiding with her sister and, later, her parents until their liberation in January 1945. Pages 43-62 give an account of the post-war period and the family's emigration to Australia in 1948. Pages 63-98 describe her new life in Melbourne, marriage to husband Michael and the birth of their children. Pages 99-200 describe her international travels, art business and grandchildren. Pages 201-22 provide reflections on life and the lasting impact of the Holocaust. The memoir is interspersed with 39 photographs.

Dita Gould was born Edith Deutsch on 14 December 1933 in Vienna to parents Ella and Ferdinand (Nandor) Deutsch. The family left Vienna for Bratislava in 1938 where her younger sister, Elizabeth (Liz), was born. Dita's father was a textile merchant, and the family was prosperous. They then moved to her father's hometown Dunaszerdahely, a majority Hungarian town in modern-day Slovakia. There, Dita had a happy childhood and religious upbringing surrounded by loving relatives.

Amid growing antisemitism, Dita's father – a prominent figure in his hometown – was accused of making anti-Hungarian statements and taken to court. After several allegations, he decided to relocate the family to Budapest. In Budapest, Dita attended a liberal, modern-Orthodox Jewish school. During the war, her father was conscripted

into the Hungarian forced labour battalion and ordered to the Russian frontline. When he attempted to bribe his way out of conscription he was arrested and released on probation. Forced to relinquish his business, he then placed his shop under the name of a Hungarian assistant.

In March 1944, Nazi Germany occupied Hungary and antisemitic persecution quickly intensified. Jewish citizens were forced to wear the yellow star, and children were barred from attending school. Dita's father was soon sent to a forced labour camp. In April, the family was forcibly relocated from their apartment to a designated Jewish area. Dita's enterprising father, although prevented from running his business, was still able to trade in textiles. With his funds he was able to obtain false papers and arrange for his family to go into hiding.

With the assistance of a friend of their father, Dita and her sister were taken, along with a small group of children, to a hospital on the outskirts of Budapest. They remained there, starving and in freezing conditions, until December 1944 when they were discovered by Nazi soldiers and sent to the Budapest ghetto. Desperate, the girls went to the ghetto soup kitchen to beg for food. The ghetto kitchen-hand, another friend of their father, took the girls under his protection and arranged for their escape. Since the ghetto's kitchen received flour deliveries from the SS headquarters at the Gellért Hotel, the underground resistance was able to arrange for families to be smuggled into an empty hotel suite where they could hide; the girls were concealed in flour sacks and transported from the ghetto to their new hiding place.

After a short time, the girls were collected by two nuns who brought them to their parents' hiding place in an abandoned mansion by the Danube. Forced to endure frequent shelling, they spent their days sheltering in the basement alongside hundreds of other hidden Jews. Discovered by Nazi soldiers and Arrow Cross militia, they were ordered to march to the ghetto. Luckily, Dita's quick-thinking father pretended his youngest daughter was dying from typhus and the family were allowed to stay behind. They were liberated by Russian soldiers on 17 January 1945.

After the war, Dita's father re-established his business. Unable to return to their original flat, the family found accommodation in the former ghetto. Due to prolonged malnourishment, the girls endured sickness and amid food shortages were forced to eat horse meat. To escape the threat posed by occupying Russian soldiers in Budapest the family returned to Dunaszerdahely.

Upon returning to her beloved hometown, Dita found few survivors from her once large community and extended family and she was the sole survivor from her Jewish school. After facing antisemitism from her school teacher, Dita and her sister were sent to a Jewish boarding school in Switzerland for three months. In 1947, their father procured an apartment in Bratislava and the girls were able to return home and attend a new

school. However, the family continued to suffer antisemitic attacks by the local Slovak population.

After securing landing permits with the assistance of her father's former business partner, the family escaped communist Czechoslovakia in 1948 by bribing German border guards and driving to Switzerland. They lived in Zurich with relatives before proceeding to Paris, where they boarded a flight to Sydney, arriving when Dita was fourteen.

After a brief time in Sydney, the family relocated to Melbourne. In order to help support the family, Dita began working at a clothing factory with her mother and father, whilst her younger sister returned to school. After eight months, her father started a successful wafer biscuit factory. When Dita was eighteen-years-old, she married husband Michael. The couple had three sons, John, Robert and Gary. In 1990, Dita became a member of the Child Survivors of the Holocaust group in Melbourne. Dita also became active at the Jewish Holocaust Museum in Melbourne.

The Girl in the Lion's Mouth is a work of creative nonfiction, with the author recreating events, places and conversations and reflecting on the personal legacy of the Holocaust. The memoir was written with the help of the author's granddaughter Anna Gould and is a richly detailed account of her 1944 experiences and the post-war years. However, due to the author's young age during the events described, the time-frame is sometimes unclear. Three-quarters of the memoir is devoted to post-war events, particularly the author's life in Australia and her travels.