

Henry B. Cyran

Title: *Inside Auschwitz: Written in blood, a personal memory*

Author: Henry B. Cyran

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Place of Publication: Brookvale, NSW.

Year of Publication: 1984

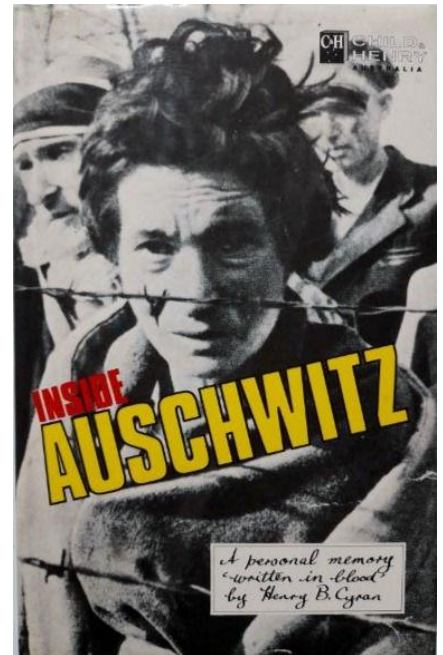
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Sydney Jewish Museum, and other public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Poland: Auschwitz-I.

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

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: concentration camp; Polish political prisoner.



Inside Auschwitz is the 118-page account of the Polish political prisoner Henry B. Cyran, who was interned in Auschwitz in 1942. It is one of the earliest Holocaust memoirs published in Australia.

Pages 1-43 describe Henry's transportation from the Montelpuch prison to Auschwitz with his friend Jozek and their induction into the camp. Pages 43-64 recount his early experiences of camp life. Pages 65-108 describe his time as prisoner-functionary and role as an orderly in the hospital ward before his transfer to Buchenwald, where the narrative ends.

The son of a respected Polish psychiatrist, Henry Cyran, graduated in medicine during the war. His birthdate and pre-war experiences are not provided. The memoir begins with a description of Henry's time in the notorious Montelpuch prison in Krakow where he and other inmates were beaten and tortured by their Gestapo guards. He does not disclose the reasons for his imprisonment, but it is implied that he had communist or partisan connections. After six months imprisonment in Montelpuch, Henry was sent to Auschwitz-I in May 1942. On arrival he was stripped, shaved, deloused and given a prison uniform with the red triangle for political prisoners.

After induction, the prisoners were greeted by a vicious SS Blockführer who immediately singled out the Jewish prisoners and Catholic priests for especially cruel physical and psychological torture. Henry was sent to a crowded barrack ruled over by brutal *Kapos* who subjected the prisoners to violent abuse. With little food the starving prisoners were made to perform useless labour carrying heavy stones and were subjected to selections where the sick and emaciated were sent to the Birkenau extermination camp. Luckily, Henry's friendship with Jozek and important prisoner-

functionaries afforded him life-saving support. This network of friends proved to be instrumental to his survival.

After suffering a terrible beating by an SS officer, Henry was sent to the camp hospital. Through his contacts with prisoner-functionaries at the hospital he secured a bed in the infectious diseases ward (which was considered safer than the surgery ward) and was nursed back to health. After discharge he secured a job as a typist in the labour bureau, but soon returned to the hospital after catching dysentery. Narrowly escaping a transport to Birkenau, he was given work as an orderly in the infectious diseases ward. This comparatively privileged role allowed Henry to advance within the prisoner hierarchy and further improved his chances of survival.

During his time as a prisoner-functionary, Henry witnessed the mass-murder of Jews, including a role on a work commando tasked with unloading a transport of Dutch Jews who were sent to the gas chambers. Soon after this particularly distressing incident, Henry sought a transfer to Buchenwald. This is where the narrative ends, at an unspecified date.

Without access to adequate medical treatment during his time in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Henry began experimenting with herbal remedies, an experience that would spark a lifelong interest in herbal medicine. After liberation, Henry joined the Polish Red Cross and later the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Refugee Organisation, providing medical care in American-run DP camps. He emigrated to Australia in 1950 and later in life published several books on Australasian herbs.

As the title suggests, *Inside Auschwitz* offers a view of daily life in Auschwitz-I. It is not a complete account of the author's experiences, but provides a detailed overview of camp life and conditions interwoven with vivid vignettes. The narrative recounts rumours and stories shared by his fellow prisoners, often regarding provocative subjects such as acts of sadism or sexual exploitation. Written from the perspective of prisoner-functionary, the memoir offers insights into aspects of camp life not often witnessed by the prisoner population. It does not cover the author's pre-war life or later wartime experiences.