

Emmy Freedman

Title: *Return to Sweetness: From Glorious Vienna to Bitter Years in Siberia*

Author: Emmy Freedman and Judy Lipschutz

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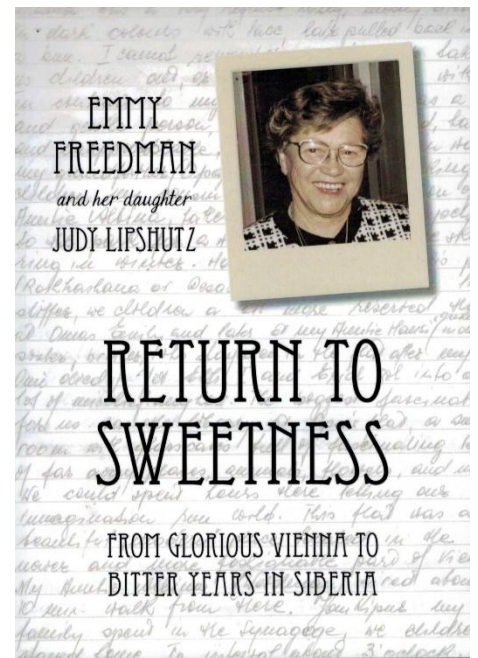
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Sydney Jewish Museum and other public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Austria; Vienna; Poland: Krakow, Rozwadów; Ukraine: Stryj, Dnipropetrovsk; Russia: Asino Chulym; Kazakhstan: Akmolinsk; Australia: Adelaide, Melbourne.

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

Genre: Memoirs

Key events/experiences: Jewish refugee; Soviet labour camps;



Return to Sweetness is the 172-page memoir of Viennese survivor Emmy Freedman, who fled to Krakow with her family just hours before the *Anschluss* (the incorporation of Austria into Nazi Germany), only to flee Nazi persecution again in 1939 and endure several years in Soviet labour camps.

Pages 1-26 cover the author's genealogy and family history. Pages 27-48 describe her idyllic childhood in Vienna. Pages 49-63 cover the family's flight to Krakow and escape to the Soviet Union. Pages 64-86 describe internment in various Soviet labour camps from June 1940 until mid-1943. Pages 87-98 cover the family's time as agricultural labourers in Kazakhstan and Ukraine until their repatriation to Poland in 1946. Pages 99-123 describe their emigration to Australia in 1947 and settlement experiences. Pages 124-72 include reflections by Emmy's daughter and granddaughter, as well as photographs and original documents.

Emmy Freedman (née Kindler) was born in Vienna on 14 January 1924 to Ernestine (Erna Esther) Benedikt and Heinz Joachim (Chaim Hersch) Kindler. She had a younger sister, Elfi, born in 1929. The sisters were raised in a middle-class, educated, and assimilated household.

Emmy enjoyed a happy and largely carefree childhood. She attended a government school, had many Christian friends, and was shielded from antisemitism.

By 1938, there was heightened tension and Emmy became increasingly aware of conversations about emigration. During this period, her mother's sister and brother emigrated to Australia with their families.

In March 1938, while on a work trip to Poland, Emmy's father urgently telephoned on the morning of the Anschluss, instructing Ernestine to leave immediately for Poland with the children, telling no one. That day, fourteen-year-old Emmy and eight-year-old Elfi returned from school, packed a small bag, and boarded a train from Vienna to Kraków just hours before Nazi forces entered the city.

When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, the Kindler family fled again to the east, this time towards Stryj where they had relatives. For days they journeyed on foot, travelling by night to escape German bombers and sheltering with strangers. They were overtaken by the German forces in the border town of Rozwadów, on the River San between Nazi and Soviet-occupied Poland.

On 2 October, the Kindler family was caught in a round-up and forced, along with many other Jews, to cross the River San into the Soviet zone after German soldiers confiscated their valuables. As Austrians, the Kindlers received some sympathy from the German soldiers and were ferried most of the way across by boat. Others were forced into the river where many drowned or were shot as they attempted to climb aboard the boats. In the chaos of the crossing, Emmy's younger sister, Elfi, was injured by bullet shrapnel.

On the eastern bank, the refugees were collected by Soviet convoys and taken to a refugee camp. After Elfi's release from hospital, the Kindlers undertook a six-week journey to Stryj. In June 1940, after registering as refugees and expressing their intention to reunite with family overseas, they were arrested by Soviet authorities, exiled to Siberia, and interned in a labour camp near Asino in the Novosibirsk Oblast following a three-week journey in overcrowded cattle wagons.

Interned in remote forest camps, they lived under constant guard in primitive conditions marked by extreme weather, poor hygiene, and infestations. They also endured exhausting forced labour, felling trees with hand saws – leaving Emmy's hands constantly blistered and bleeding – while subsisting on meagre rations of watery porridge, black bread, and soup made from rotten potatoes. Even ten-year-old Elfi was compelled to work, though Emmy ensured she was assigned the least arduous tasks.

The family was interned in various labour camps as Austrians and enemies of the state. In the winter of 1942, the Kindlers were transferred to another camp near Chulym. Desperate to secure the family's release, Emmy's father, Chaim, began writing letters to the Polish delegation. Meanwhile, Emmy was forced to undertake a range of gruelling tasks, including lumbering, laying railway lines, and building barracks, and her health deteriorated.

On 8 February 1943, after his appeals went unanswered, Chaim persuaded the family to leave the camp and walk to the town of Chulym in search of assistance. On arrival, they were immediately arrested by secret police and sent to an even harsher camp. Soon afterwards, Chaim was arrested and sent to a re-education camp where he died.

Due to a severe typhus outbreak in mid-1943, the Kindler women were permitted to work on a nearby farm under the supervision of a former prisoner. With his assistance, they escaped by hiding in an open log truck, reaching Chulym where they boarded a train, eventually reaching the Polish delegation in Akmolinsk, Kazakhstan, where they obtained official documents. This allowed them to secure work and rations, labouring in potato fields and living in extremely modest conditions with a Kazakh family.

Desperate to return to Europe, the family volunteered in mid-1944 to join a transport of Poles sent to work in Ukraine, where they laboured in potato and sunflower fields at a collective farm in Dnipropetrovsk. In February 1946, the family was finally repatriated to Poland and sought emigration, contacting their family overseas.

After securing landing permits from their Australian relatives, the family left for Paris in January 1947, living with relatives. One month later, they boarded the *Ville d'Amiens* for Australia, arriving after a six-week voyage, initially settling in Adelaide before relocating to Melbourne a few years later. In 1950, Emmy met her future husband, Oscar Freedman. They married in 1954 and had two daughters, Henny and Judy.

Return to Sweetness is a detailed autobiography, carefully attentive to dates, names, and places. The author's limited awareness of events in Vienna result in a sparse account of Nazism in Austria; by contrast, the memoir offers a detailed and comprehensive portrayal of refugee life and provides valuable documentation of the Rozwadów expulsion and internment in Soviet labour camps. Throughout, the narrative includes reflective commentary on Jewish life in Austria, Poland, the Soviet Union, and Australia, alongside observations on culture, community and family.