

Mania Kinderlerer

Title: *Struggle for Survival and Reunion with Klara*

Author: Mania Kinderlerer

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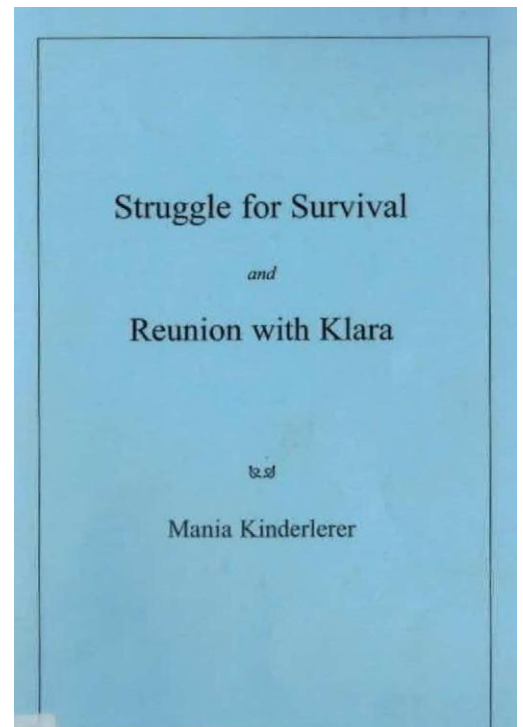
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library

Cities/towns/camps: Poland, Sosnowiec, Grünberg-Schlesien; Czechoslovakia: Polrado, Plauen, Hof, Zwodau; Germany: Flossenbürg; Australia: Melbourne; USA: Washington

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

Genre: Memoirs

Key events/experiences: ghetto; concentration camp; death march.



Struggle for Survival is a 33-page typescript recounting the final months of Mania Kinderlerer's wartime ordeal. The memoir focuses on the bonds between Mania and her two closest friends, Cesia and Klara (with whom they lost contact on a death march in early 1945), and follows Mania and Cesia through repeated cycles of escape and recapture until liberation in May 1945.

Pages 1-20 recount the author's experiences on the death march from Grünberg-Schlesien in January 1945 until liberation in May. Pages 21-33 describe how she befriended Klara in April 1944 in Grünberg-Schlesien, and her subsequent reunion with Klara in America after 37 years of separation.

Mania (Miriam) Kinderlerer (née Kornhendler) was born on 4 February 1923 in Sosnowiec, Poland. During the war, she was interned in the Sosnowiec ghetto before being deported in June 1942 to the Grünberg-Schlesien concentration camp where she was forced to work in a factory shredding the clothing of Jewish deportees who had been transported to Auschwitz. It was in this camp that she formed a close friendship with Cesia Magierkiewicz.

In April 1944, Mania and Cesia befriended Klara Jornitzer, who was transferred to Grünberg-Schlesien from Auschwitz. The three women became inseparable, sharing food and scarce resources while providing one another with emotional and physical support.

On 21 January 1945, as the Soviet army advanced, the inmates of Grünberg-Schlesien were forced onto a death march, enduring freezing temperatures, starvation, and relentless brutality. After several days, the column reached a settlement crowded with German refugees. Taking advantage of the chaos, the three friends escaped into the surrounding forest. In the confusion, Mania and Cesia were separated from Klara, and despite a desperate search they could not find her.

Cesia and Mania wandered for days through the countryside, hiding in barns and relying on aid from local farmers. Fearing starvation and exposure, they ultimately concluded that their only chance of survival was to rejoin a passing death march, even though they saw some prisoners collapse from exhaustion, others shot for falling behind. Sustained on little more than breadcrumbs and water, they stole frozen potatoes from surrounding fields. While sheltering in a barn at night, the women escaped again, wandering the countryside as fugitives before hunger and exposure drove them to rejoin another transport.

Later, while resting in another barn, Mania and Cesia made a third attempt to escape, concealing themselves in the haystacks with several other prisoners. The guards soon began searching the stacks, killing those they discovered. From their hiding place, the two women witnessed the murder of twelve Jewish prisoners.

After a farmer alerted the local police, the women were questioned but released, given shoes and food and ordered to leave. They soon joined a transport heading toward Czechoslovakia. A sympathetic guard brought them to his home in Polrado, but their refuge lasted only a week before neighbours denounced them.

They were subsequently taken to a remand camp in Plauen, then transferred to a jail in Hof, and finally deported to Flossenbürg. A few days later, they were sent to Zwodau, a sub-camp of Flossenbürg, where they joined thousands of prisoners and refugees and encountered former inmates from Grünberg-Schlesien, although Klara was not among them.

In Zwodau they endured further brutality, including beatings by Kapos. Mania became seriously ill but survived due to Cesia's care. The prisoners were again forced onto a death march. Mania and Cesia escaped and hid in an abandoned bakery, where they remained until liberated by the American army a few days later.

After the war, the three women went separate ways.

Mania married Motek Kinderlerer, a fellow Holocaust survivor from Sosnowiec. In 1949, the couple emigrated to Australia to join surviving relatives, settling in Melbourne where they raised two daughters, Leah and Sarah. The memoir does not provide detail of their emigration or post-war life.

Cesia and her husband emigrated to Israel. Seventeen years after their separation, Cesia located Klara's surname in an Israeli telephone directory and arranged their reunion. Klara later emigrated to the United States and in 1983, while attending the International Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Washington, D.C., Mania was finally reunited with her – thirty-seven years after they had been separated on the death march.

Struggle for Survival offers a brief account of the author's wartime experiences, focusing primarily on the death marches of early 1945. It does not recount her time in the Sosnowiec ghetto. Despite its brevity, it is a remarkably lucid and detailed testimony. Although the author remained silent for fifty-one years, her recollections are rendered with striking clarity and immediacy. The narrative also candidly recounts incidents of sexual violence, as well as offering insights into the enduring psychological effects of trauma, prolonged silence and the difficulties of bearing witness. At its core, the memoir is a moving account of friendship, feminine strength, and enduring bonds forged amid destruction.