

# **Alicia Study Guide**

**Alicia by Alicia Appleman-Jurman**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Alicia Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 - 3: Before the War; Life Under the Russians; The German Occupation.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 4-7: My First Escape; My Brother Bunio, Guralis and Radishes, The First.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 8-11: My Brother Zachary; Bella; In Chortkov Prison; Milek.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 12-14: Reunion; In the Fields; Wujciu.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 15-17: The Bitter Winter of 1943; My Mother; Struggle to Survive.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 18: Return to Buczacz.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 19-21: In a Russian Prison; My Orphanage; The Brecha.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 22-23: Lodz; The Badgastein DP Camp.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 24-Epilogue: School in Belgium; Coming Home; Epilogue.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>



## Plot Summary

Alicia Jurman is a study in the strength of the human spirit, creative problem-solving, and sustaining one's life by ingenuity and determination. The daughter of a factory owner, Alicia spent her early childhood in a stable Jewish family of six, until the German invasion and occupation of Poland and her small town of Buczacz. Forced into a ghetto, the life Alicia had known was systematically destroyed, with the murder of her father and ultimately, all three brothers. She and her mother were able to avoid the German "Judenrein actions" by hiding in underground bunkers and fleeing their town to hide in forests and ravines. On a number of occasions, Alicia was actually caught but managed to escape into an amazing journey around the villages and farms of Poland, disguising herself as a Pole or Ukrainian when necessary, in order to work in farmers' fields for a daily ration of bread and sour milk, which she shared with her mother, who often hid in the wheat fields during the day. At one point, they were taken in by a hermit, who eventually housed a number of Jews in his tiny hut. With the Russian invasion, Buczacz was liberated, and the two returned to their home town. When the Germans occupied Buczacz again, however, her mother was killed, and Alicia, escaping a firing squad, was on the run again.

As the Russians attempted to occupy Poland again, Alicia endeared herself to a troop of soldiers by freeing them from a makeshift German prison and was given papers attesting to her heroism. These documents allowed her to travel more freely about Poland and to engage in endeavors to improve her existence as well as those of other Jewish survivors. At one point, she opened and ran an orphanage, creating a small haven for surviving Jewish children. Faced with Russian anti-Semitism and resulting pogroms, Alicia then became involved in an organization that was illegally transporting Jews to Israel. By this point, she was only 14 years old, and the war had ended. Contracting a serious illness, she landed in a displaced persons' camp in Austria and from there, made her way to Marseilles, where she boarded a ship bound for Israel. Caught by the British, she spent 8 months on the island of Cyprus before the British allowed her entry. There, she met and married her American husband and eventually emigrated to America. Alicia's story is an amazing tale of survival, and it reads like a suspense-filled page turner, as this young girl outwits the Germans, Polish collaborators, Ukrainians, and Russians, emerging in triumph.



# Chapters 1 - 3: Before the War; Life Under the Russians; The German Occupation

## Chapters 1 - 3: Before the War; Life Under the Russians; The German Occupation Summary and Analysis

As a child, Alicia Jurman lived in Buczacz, Poland with her parents and four brothers, and Chapter one describes a rather idyllic existence for this Jewish family, proud of its heritage, its schools, and its beautiful Synagogue. The boys were musical, playing instruments and singing in the choir, while studying Hebrew in preparation for their ultimate bar mitzvahs. During her early years, Alicia did not experience Antisemitism, partially because she was protected, and, in her school, Jews and Gentiles attended and established cross-cultural friendships. Her first experience came, however, when her brother Zachary was beaten by five Polish boys while on his way to the music conservatory. Alicia first heard of Germany and war in 1938, by overhearing conversation of some adults at a candy store, specifically, that Poland could be invaded. Her normal life continued on, but the seed of fear had been planted and continued to be of concern.

Chapter 2 confirmed Alicia's concerns when Germany invaded Poland and easily defeated the less skilled Polish national army. Because Hitler had reached an agreement with Stalin, however, Alicia's section of Poland was occupied not by Russians, not Germans. This occupation was not harsh, for the Russian soldiers were pleasant, provided the local merchants with a great deal of business, and were especially kind to the children. Life went on as normal, except that pictures of Lenin and Stalin were now installed in all of the schools, and the children had to learn Russian and Ukrainian. Gradually, however, Russians took over local businesses, and some students began to disappear from Alicia's classes. In fact, their entire families disappeared, accused of un-named crimes and were, everyone believed, sent to Siberia. As well, it became a crime to teach Hebrew. Older boys were encouraged to attend school in Moscow, and Moshe, the second oldest volunteered to go. He returned, several months later, having escaped from the school, gaunt and thin. Immediately, the Russians arrested him, and a few months later the family was informed that he had died in prison, probably of food poisoning. The family, of course, was devastated.

More devastation came in chapter three, as the Germans arrived, the truce between Germany and Russia having disintegrated. Within a few days, about sixty Jewish men were forced to report to the police station and were never seen again. Among them was Alicia's father. Only later did the children discover that their mother had taken everything

of value, in order to ransom their father, to no avail. Now the family was broke as well as fatherless.



# Chapters 4-7: My First Escape; My Brother Bunio, Guralis and Radishes, The First

## Chapters 4-7: My First Escape; My Brother Bunio, Guralis and Radishes, The First Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 begins with the movement of all Jews in Buczacz to a single neighborhood, named the ghetto. Because rumors of this forced move had pre-dated it, Alicia's family had time to begin to move their possessions into a room of a home some friends already owned in this area. New regulations, including the wearing of the yellow Star of David, an immediate execution for entering the synagogue, a curfew, and prohibition from certain streets and neighborhoods, soon followed. Alicia's mother and younger children went to the marketplace everyday, in order to sell what they could for enough to feed the family. Alicia bought soap and attempted to sell it for a few cents more, all the while hiding among the wagons to avoid the German and Ukrainian police. One day, Bunio, now the oldest brother was sent to a work camp about one hundred miles away. The family did without in order to send weekly packages of food to Bunio.

Alicia herself was taken, while visiting some friends, and forced into a boxcar for transport. As the men were able to pry some window bars loose, a number of smaller children, including Alicia, were pushed out of the train when it slowed down. She had no choice but to follow the railroad tracks home, not knowing how far the train had traveled. Making it home, her brother Zachary convinced her that she had to go with him to the Judenrat to tell her story. A fierce argument broke out, as the members of this council explained to Zachary that there was no point in attempting resistance, for the Germans would simply kill more women and children. Zachary was livid as they walked home.

A short Chapter 5 revealed that Bunio had been shot in retaliation for one of the work camp inmates escaping. The family was crushed, now having lost their father and two brothers. To survive, however, they had to continue on, haggling and selling whatever possible.

In Chapter 6, Alicia described three experiences which obviously left a large impression. One day in the market, she was surprised to hear the dialect of some people who had obviously come from the mountainous region of her birth. She began to talk with the woman sitting in the wagon and learned that they knew her family well. Unfortunately, all of her relatives, including her grandfather, were murdered by Ukrainians. She was offered passage back to the mountains with this family and almost went. In the end, she could not leave her mother nor could she reveal that grandfather was dead. She then joined a bank of boys who would arise at 2:00 a.m., swim the river, and pick up



branches from the forest floor on the other side. The family needed wood for heat and cooking, so any wood she could obtain would be helpful. Gentile boys discovered them, however, and she barely escaped. Alicia's mother went to the road daily and attempted to barter whatever of value she had for pieces of bread. When her dysentery prevented her from going, Alicia took the last two kitchen towels and traded them for a basket of radishes. Hoping to sell them for bread, she came upon some obviously starving children and made the sacrifice of giving them the radishes while she told the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

By Chapter 7, food became even scarcer, as the family and other residents of the home attempted to accumulate some stores for the winter months ahead. One early morning, before daybreak, Alicia was awakened by her mother, and all ten residents moved through the backyard to a thick wall, into which there was a makeshift shelter. They all climbed into the wall and waited while the Gestapo searched the neighborhood. When it was all over, two thousand residents of the ghetto had been murdered. Alicia then visited the oldest Jewish resident, asking him how this horrific situation could be God's will, coming away with no acceptable answer.



# Chapters 8-11: My Brother Zachary; Bella; In Chortkov Prison; Milek

## Chapters 8-11: My Brother Zachary; Bella; In Chortkov Prison; Milek Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 reinforced the cruelty and incredible suffering of the ghetto Jews. Because winter was coming, a new hiding place, called a bunker, had to be devised under the house. This was completed as one of the young women at the home delivered a baby boy. When word of an impending German raid came, the baby was given some strong tea, perhaps with a bit of whiskey, and left to sleep, hidden in the kitchen, while the others headed underground. The baby was found and shot, though the others survived. About half of the ghetto had been murdered, and two additional young girls, now orphans, were taken in.

Zachary and Alicia continued to sell flints and soap, while their mother went to work as a housekeeper for a German family in their old neighborhood. At one point, Zachary found the older sister of the two new house residents and managed to find a farmer who agreed to hide the three girls while the older one tutored his son for his school exams. Once the tutoring was completed, the farmer turned in all three girls, and they were shot. This action was the last straw for Zachary, and he joined other boys in a resistance effort. He, too, was caught and hanged outside the police station. Now, only Alicia, younger brother Herzl, and her mother remained.

Chapter 9 provided an additional Jewish family story, as Alicia meets Bella, a large new resident of the ghetto, who, with her siblings and two children, had moved from the countryside into one of the empty houses in the ghetto. Bella's father was a furrier who supplied farmers and their families with fur coats for the winter. Eventually, he was turned in and murdered. Bella's husband had been taken by the Russians in 1941 and never returned. When the farmers kidnapped the remainder of the family, Bella overcame the one driving them to the police station, and they escaped into the ghetto, selling the farmer's wagon and horses for food. Alicia and Bella's sister Rachel became fast friends.

Mistaken for her mother in Chapter 10, Alicia is taken, along with other adults, to a prison in Chortkov, the same prison in which Moshe died. There, they are placed into crowded cells and given water tainted with typhoid bacteria. Beaten and ill, an unconscious Alicia is presumed dead and piled with other bodies, to be buried by the ghetto Jews in the town. She is rescued and taken to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gold, who nurse her back to health and send her by wagon, hidden under hay, back to her home. There she finds her mother and Herzl sick with typhoid themselves. As well, a number of old friends from Alicia's childhood home in the mountains had arrived in the ghetto and were engaged in resistance activity, most important, a teen boy named





Milek. Alicia learned as well that Rachel had died and Bella and her children had disappeared.

As Alicia and Milek nursed her mother and Herzl back to health, the Gestapo came again in Chapter 11. Unable to get them into the bunker in the kitchen, Alicia pushed them into a small bunker under the bedroom floor and hid herself under the bed. Fortunately, they were not discovered. The additional piece of fortune was that Mrs. Gold had given Alicia a package, which, when opened, revealed four hundred zlotys. After giving Milek fifty for his household, the money fed Alicia's family for the remainder of the winter. As spring arrived, the remaining residents of the ghetto were told that they would be sent to another ghetto in Kopechince. Deciding that it would be best to be among the first to go, Alicia's mother immediately arranged for their departure through the Judenrat. They arrived and were placed in a large home, choosing the kitchen for their quarters.

Gradually, their new home filled up, and the men began to build a bunker. It was not large enough when the SS came to "cleanse" the ghetto, and, after getting her mother and brother into the space, Alicia went into a bedroom where two babies remained. As she was feeding them, hoping that they would then sleep, she was caught. The babies were immediately shot in the head. Alicia was placed in the "death march" to the local prison and ultimately into the forest where a huge trench had been dug and in which dead Jews already lay. As the troops prepared to kill Alicia's group, machine gun fire opened upon the troops, led by Milek. Alicia ran into the forest, refusing to stop until certain she could not be found.



# Chapters 12-14: Reunion; In the Fields; Wujciu

## Chapters 12-14: Reunion; In the Fields; Wujciu Summary and Analysis

Alicia woke up in the forest with no idea where she was. The family plan had been, however, that if they were to be separated, they would make their way back to Buczacz, however, she had no idea how to get there. As she walked, she found fields of wheat, being worked by peasants. Pretending to be from the mountainous region, Alicia was able to get a day's work and food, moving from farm to farm, finally getting directions to the Stripa River, knowing that following it would return her to her town. Once in Buczacz, she risked going to the home of former neighbors. There, she received food and the information that her mother had not been seen. Going into the ghetto, she retrieved from a hiding place in the wall, a gold ring given her by Mikel. Alicia knew she could not remain in Buczacz and decided to find a hiding place nearby, ultimately a ravine. There, she was found by her mother. Herzl's whereabouts were unknown but Alicia resolved to protect her mother from that point on, no matter what the cost.

Chapter 13 provided a brief history lesson of the relationships between Poles and Ukrainians. Following World War I, Poland had annexed part of the Ukraine, and there was a great deal of resentment on the part of Ukrainians, who happily aided the Nazis in the Polish occupation. Ukrainian gangs, once participating in the extermination of the Jews, began to turn their rage upon other Poles. Alicia and her mother carefully studied the farms surrounding several villages, and Alicia would then offer her services as a field worker, receiving food as payment. At one point, Alicia noticed a plume of smoke in the middle of many fields, and there she found a small shack-type home, several bee hives, and a man just recovering from an obvious epileptic fit. He was an outcast, as the villagers believed him to be possessed by demons. After tea, bread, and a little conversation, Alicia promised to return for a visit, contemplating the possibility that she and her mother might be able to hide there when the fall came. Instead, however, during work in a new field, she overheard the female owner complaining that she needed help at home. Alicia volunteered immediately, placing her mother in the hayloft and working from dawn to dusk. Her eventual confession to her employer did not matter until a neighbor noticed Alicia and began to ask questions. At that point, they had to leave. There was no choice but to return to the beekeeper, where she discovered that he was hiding a Jewish woman and her children in his tiny home. She and her mother were welcomed as well.

Throughout Chapter 14, Alicia continued to move from field to field, working for food for herself and mother; the other family left during the day as well, and seemed to have some means of gathering small amounts of food. The evening meals were a combination of what the house guests could provide and contributions from the



beekeeper. Alicia began to call him Wujciu, which means "uncle" in Polish. One day, working in a Ukrainian field, Alicia overheard a conversation among some young men who had discovered that some Jews were hiding in the wheat fields, whom they would turn over to the police. Alicia fled the field and tracked down the mother and two children, eventually convincing Wujciu to take them in as well. There were now eight Jews in the beekeeper's small dwelling, and there was constant fear that they would be found, particularly as harvest time would bring so many workers closeby.

During the harvest period, Alicia worked particularly long days but was able to filch larger amounts of food, so everyone ate a bit better. As the harvest ended, however, Alicia knew she would have to find other work, perhaps in the village of Wujciechovka, during the winter months. She had adapted to peasant mannerisms quite well, her only concern being finding some winter clothing in order to move about in the cold weather. Finally, she decided that Slavka would be the source, and Wujciu would be the means. Wujciu managed to get a ride into Buczacz with a farming family and took a note to Slavka. That night, he returned with a jacket, shawl and shoes for Alicia, along with a large amount of bread. He also brought news from Slavka that Herzl had returned to Buczacz but had been turned in by a former schoolmate and had been executed. Alicia was now faced with telling her mother that her last son was dead.



# Chapters 15-17: The Bitter Winter of 1943; My Mother; Struggle to Survive

## Chapters 15-17: The Bitter Winter of 1943; My Mother; Struggle to Survive Summary and Analysis

Chapter 15 began by describing the means that Alicia used for survival during the winter of 1943. Alicia was reduced, in most instances, to begging. In doing so, she went to the homes of farmers for whom she had worked during the summer and fall and managed to provide enough to keep the people in the little house barely alive. One of the things that helped was the growing fear among the Poles that the Ukrainians, having essentially eliminated the villages of Jews, now began to turn on the Poles themselves, and Poles in return began to have a bit more sympathy for what the Jews had suffered. As well, those young male Jews who had managed to survive had established resistance forces and were providing protection to the Poles in return for sleeping quarters and food.

One night, waiting in a barn for the chance to do some chores, she was startled to be confronted by a beautiful young girl named Manka. During conversation, Manka revealed that everyone in the village knew she was Jewish but had not turned her in because she was such a hard field worker. That night she ate dinner with Manka, her father and brother. The father informed Alicia that, although they could certainly not offer her lodging in their home, she was welcome to come at night, every several days, in order to obtain some food. She periodically enjoyed meals and social time with Manka, one of the few joys of that winter.

Another incident during the winter involved a gang of young Ukrainians beating on the little house late one night. Everyone hid in the storage room but Alicia who answered the door. One of the young men recognized Alicia from the fields and called her by her Ukrainian pseudonym, demanding to know why she was living with Jews. In anger, Alicia admitted that she was a Jew and informed the Ukrainians that, if they harmed her or any residents of this house, she would curse them from her grave. Because Ukrainians were naturally a superstitious people, they finally left. Still, in case they got drunk and returned, everyone left and slept in barns that night, returning the next day, of course, because they had no other place to go. January was an especially difficult month for Alicia and she was even forced to go into Ukrainian villages, which were more dangerous. One night, waiting in a barn, however, she came upon an old Jewish tailor, hiding in a bunker beneath the barn. He had escaped the initial massacre of Jewish men in Buczacz, and Alicia realized that he had been in the same group as her father. Her father's death was confirmed by this old tailor, and Alicia began to grieve all over again.

As March and the early signs of spring began to appear, rumors began to circulate that the Germans were being defeated by the Russians and that soon the Russians would



be liberating Poland. The Poles that supplied Alicia with work and food became far friendlier and less concerned about assisting Jews in general.

March 24, 1944 was the beginning of Chapter 16. Alicia arose before dawn to walk to a farmer's home, a couple for whom she had worked and who had given her some food a few previous times. This morning, however, they invited her into their home for breakfast. There, she was told that the Russians had entered the town, liberated it, and that the fighting had moved far west. Alicia and her mother, along with the two other Jewish families, left Wujciu and returned to Buczacz, finding the streets filled with joyous Poles, though only a few Jews. Alicia and her mother stayed in the home of her former Ukrainian school friend, Slavka, but mother soon rented an apartment and was able to provide food, probably from money borrowed from Slavka's mother. The Jewish survivors did not talk with one another much, perhaps because they could not openly share their grief or perhaps because they felt guilt at having survived. They recognized each other, however, because of their shabby clothing and their thin bodies. Gradually, they began to rebuild lives over a two-month period.

Suddenly, the quiet of the night was invaded by explosions. The Germans had broken through the Russian lines and were returning to Buczacz! Within a day, the Russians had fled, and Alicia and her mother huddled in their apartment. The SS came and ordered them out. Mother was killed, and Alicia taken to the prison. The following morning, all prisoners were marched to the execution site Alicia knew well, and she also knew that the one chance for escape was to run for the river and hide in a large hollow in a huge tree she had found once before. Successful, Alicia was alive but on the run again. Begging for food, and receiving some assistance from some fellow Buczacz refugees, she managed to accumulate a small bundle of food and join a large group of refugees heading west.

May in central Poland, where Alicia now found herself, was planting time, and she had no difficulty finding work on farms, and she passed herself off as a Ukrainian whose family had been killed by the Germans. Here, in this part of Poland, there was far less suspicion that Jews might be hiding out, but she still moved from farm to farm on a daily basis. At one point, she attempted to travel by train with a group of Ukrainian young people, on their way to work on German farms. The train was unsuccessfully attacked by Russian partisans, and Alicia assisted some of them to escape, once they were caught and imprisoned at the station. She moved on into the forests, wishing to join the partisans she had rescued, but they would not allow one so young to travel with them. Again, she worked in the fields, sleeping in the summer forest at night. With the cover story that she was an orphaned Ukrainian, she finally worked primarily for one elderly couple and their children, a girl named Paula and younger twin boys. She grew especially fond of the boys, and they of her. She volunteered to work in the German military kitchen close by in order to obtain extra food. There she overheard talk that the German soldiers had discovered the hideout of the Russian partisans, and, taking a horse in the night, rode into the forest to warn them.

Within a month, the Russian army had managed to push the Germans out of the area where Alicia stayed, and one night, a group of Russian soldiers arrived at the farm,



asking to speak with Alicia. She went with them to their headquarters where she was toasted and fed as a hero, for having saved the partisan troops in the forest. She was then introduced to the commander of the regiment, a Jew like herself, and learned that his wife and children had been murdered by the Germans during their invasion of Russia. Only he and his son, Kola, remained. Kola, as it turned out, was one of the partisans she had rescued at the train station. When she indicated to them that she only wished to return to Buczacz, they accommodated her with transportation, food, gifts and money.



# Chapter 18: Return to Buczacz

## Chapter 18: Return to Buczacz Summary and Analysis

Alicia's much improved return to Buczacz was detailed in Chapter 18. First, she found Bella, a woman whom she had known from the original ghetto, whose only remaining relative was her young son. Bella was managing a restaurant and she put Alicia in touch with a Jewish man who could assist her in finding her mother's grave. It was Alicia's desire to give her mother a proper burial in the Jewish cemetery of the village. This was accomplished. Alicia's next goal was to locate Wujciu, and to reward him with nice clothing she had confiscated from a vacant house on her travels home. During market day, she recognized a couple for whom she worked, who lived in the village next to Wujciu's cottage, and convinced them to bring him to town the following week, paying them rubles to do so. The reunion with Wujciu was joyous, and he was treated to a wonderful meal, a hot bath and new clothes. As he bathed, Alicia sewed money into the lining of his new jacket, in order to keep it safe and to prevent him from refusing it. As well, she sent Manka a letter and clothing gifts, in order to thank her and her family for their kindness toward her.

Alicia herself moved in with a family by the name of Siegel, but "adopted" Bella's young son Danny, who was having serious issues about the existence of God. As well, she assisted Bella in the restaurant, waiting on customers and clearing tables and tutoring Danny in his schoolwork. She was also sent to visit a young boy, Benjamin, who had lost half of a leg, in the hopes that she could assist him emotionally. Alicia thought that perhaps in service to others she could rid herself of her own loneliness and despair. Benjamin had survived the German occupation only to have his leg blown off by a land mine. He was sixteen and in such depression that he would not talk for the first five days of Alicia's visits. She then began to speak of her childhood, and conversation was finally accomplished. First, she told Benjamin about her father, Sigmund Jurman, his military heroism as an Austrian officer during World War I, and his great love for her mother, Frieda. They became quite good friends, and Benjamin eventually revealed his plan to move to Palestine, as many European Jews had decided to do. He had lost his family, and his best friend had been killed as they were walking together when the land mine exploded. Alicia was stunned to learn that Benjamin's friend was Milek and she collapsed. Several days later, she and Benjamin visited Milek's grave in the Jewish cemetery and Alicia then realized that it was time to leave Buczacz and all of her painful memories.





# Chapters 19-21: In a Russian Prison; My Orphanage; The Brecha

## Chapters 19-21: In a Russian Prison; My Orphanage; The Brecha Summary and Analysis

With no ultimate destination in mind, Alicia left her home village, riding in Russian army vehicles to Chortkov, with a letter of introduction from Bella to some friends in that village. In the marketplace, however, Alicia encountered Mrs. Taub, a pregnant woman with a 6-year old son, who, having been hidden in underground bunkers during his early years, was now terrified of being outside among other people. Alicia moved in with the Taub's and works with Moishele, introducing him gradually to the outdoors, specifically less traveled streets and the public well. At the well on day, Alicia reunited with Sabina, a former fellow student from Buczacz.

Based upon Sabina's information about another Buczacz family, the Blieners, who were currently living in Russian-occupied Romania with their daughter, another school chum, Alicia set off the village of Chernovtsy. Selling some shawls that she had, Alicia made her way to Chernovtsy and reunited with Dora Bliener, meeting, as well, Dora's friend Bronia. Bronia took Alicia to see the city, where they were stopped by two Russian policemen, asking for their papers. Alicia was able to give them the papers she received from the Russian partisans, naming her a hero, and, upon being taken to the police station, she was treated well, but suspected of involvement in the black market. In fact, Bronia was involved in the black market, along with the Blieners, and Alicia convinced her never to reveal the names of her fellow conspirators.

Alicia and Bronia spent three and a half months in the prison, on a starvation diet, enduring regular interrogation and punishments. Finally, Bronia's brother, a Polish army officer, was able to locate Bronia and managed to collect forty thousand rubles for their release. They were taken to a friend's home and nursed back to health. Alicia returned to the Taub's, only to learn that they were planning a permanent move to America, assisted by Mr. Taub's brother who lived in Boston. Alicia was given the opportunity to go with them, under the name of a niece who had died, but Alicia had been contemplating another direction for her life. It was a move to Israel.

Alicia's story of imprisonment and refusal to reveal any information about those Jews engaged in black marketeering circulated quickly, and the townspeople arrived one night to celebrate her loyalty. At the end of this celebration, they presented her with a large bag containing thousands of rubles. She decided to travel to Bielsko, the site of her father's former factory, and, she hoped, a temporary stop on her way to Israel. She began the journey by train, with another girl she had met, Rivka, who was traveling to Krakow.





Chapter 20 found Alicia and Rivka on the train. At one stop, the girls decided to get off to buy some tea, asking an elderly couple to watch their luggage. As they arrived back at the station, their train was pulling out, along with all of their belongings, including Alicia's money. Because they had their tickets, the girls were able to board another train for Krakow. Hitching a ride with on a Russian military truck, Alicia went on to Bielsko. There at the military headquarters, with her documents, Alicia was fed. Moving to the marketplace, apparently the method by which Jews found one another, Alicia was informed that the Sharf family would probably take her in. The Sharf's had a lovely apartment and two older sons. One was married, the other ill and incapacitated by internment in a concentration camp. Alicia remained with the Sharf's, assisting with household chores and shopping for food. She visited the site of her father's former factory but with fear, because it had become widely known that Christian Poles had taken over former Jewish property and would often kill any Jews who returned to claim it. After one look, she walked away, realizing that attempting to claim her father's property would not bring him back.

In her wanderings around Bielsko, Alicia encountered Jewish orphans, some of whom the Sharf's took in. Realizing that she wanted to nurture these children, Alicia knew that she had to find a place where they could all live. Mr. Sharf helped her locate an abandoned apartment, formerly owned by a Jew who had died in a labor camp, and she and the children moved in. Russian soldiers who were also Jewish began to help as well. They gathered clothing from abandoned homes and apartments and gave them to Alicia. What the children could not wear, they sold in the marketplace, and were able to accumulate enough money to eat and even to establish small savings accounts, which were held by Mr. Sharf. Two Jews from the neighboring town of Lodz purchased most of the clothing, because they were able to sell it at a profit back in their own town.

As time went on, Alicia worried about the future. At some point, someone would arrive and demand rent for the apartment. As well, the Jewish Russian soldiers who were supplying the clothing would someday return to their own homes. She considered trying to hire a teacher for the children, so they would at least have some education, knowing, however, that, in reality, all Jews should probably leave Poland. The Christians did not like them, and many had collaborated with the Germans in order to obtain Jewish property and valuables. They simply did not want a large Jewish population in their country, attempting to reclaim what was theirs. Fate was about to intervene.

The beginning of Chapter 21 found the orphans healthy and much happier, and there was plenty of money for food and supplies. The two young men who had been purchasing the clothing eventually spoke to Alicia about the Brecha, a Jewish organization that was smuggling Jews into the new state of Israel. Because the British were only allowing a certain number to go, The Brecha had been organized to assist those who could not obtain the proper immigration papers, and the goal was to get all Jews out of Russian-occupied Europe and Poland. Already, there had been a couple of pogroms, and Jews living in the eastern and southern parts of Europe were eager to get out. The leader of the Brecha was a young woman by the name of Tzivia, and they arranged a meeting between Alicia and her in Lodz. Because Alicia had papers introducing her as a hero to the Russians, and because she could speak Russian



fluently, Tzivia wanted Alicia to become a transporter of Jews. In return, the Brecha would take over the orphanage and see that the children were fed, educated, and ultimately, transported to Israel as well. With great ambivalence, Alicia eventually agreed to become a part of this movement. Leaving the orphans and the Sharf's was difficult for Alicia, but she knew that the children would be well cared for and that, if any difficulty arose, the family would step up. Prior to her departure, Ben Sharf gave to Alicia a large sum of money, in American dollars, Russian rubles, and gold coins, which were placed into pockets of a belt hidden beneath her skirt. Saying goodbye to the other brother, Herman, was especially difficult as his diagnosed tuberculosis was too advanced for him to survive much longer.



# Chapters 22-23: Lodz; The Badgastein DP Camp

## Chapters 22-23: Lodz; The Badgastein DP Camp Summary and Analysis

Chapter 22 covered Alicia's brief but eventful association with the Brecha, headquartered in Lodz. Her training to be a transporter included assisting with two transports, lead by Ursula. The goal was to move the Polish Jews into Western Europe and, from there, to Israel. False travel papers were purchased from only-too-willing authorities, both Polish and Russian, and they traveled in freight train cars and on foot, stopping at Brecha sites along the way, including abandoned schools and hospitals. Eventually, Alicia led her own first transport quite successfully. In between trips, she relaxed at the home of a fellow Brecha worker, Peppa. At one point, Alicia and Peppa traveled to Breslau, a city on the German border, to see the war damage. While there, a young boy, known to Peppa from Lodz, was arrested by the Polish police, without provocation. Understanding that appealing to the police would only bring trouble to themselves, Alicia went to the Russian army headquarters and presented her documents as a partisan hero. He immediately went to the police station with the girls and arranged for the young man's release. He returned to Lodz with Alicia and Peppa. Alicia was also able to secure the release of another young man, but the realization set in that the Poles were just as determined to rid their country of Jews as the Germans had been, by whatever means necessary.

A toothache took Alicia to a dentist in Lodz one day. The tooth was pulled, but the bleeding did not subside and, in a terribly weak state, she attempted to get back to her dentist. She ran into a Polish army officer who showed concern and immediately took her to the dentist, who, as it turned out, was simply substituting for his wife while she was in the hospital. Nevertheless, the incident had an unusual conclusion. The Polish army officer was Jewish and a cousin of Alicia's mother. He immediately took Alicia home with him, where his sister Sofie also lived. Sofie had lost her husband and children and decided that Alicia would become the daughter she did not now have. She lavished attention upon her, having dresses made, getting her hair styled, and teaching her table manners. She insisted that Alicia quit her work for the Brecha, but, of course, Alicia could not abandon her loyalty to this organization.

On what would be her final transport, Alicia ran into some difficulty. Three Russian Jew army officers were traveling with this group, disguised as women, and the travel papers this time listed all of these individuals as Greek Jews, returning to Greece from labor camps in Hungary. Because of a pogrom in Krakow, the group had to remain in the abandoned Jewish school for a week. They were then stopped at another border to be inspected more carefully. In order to get the group out of this mess, Alicia was forced to turn over her money belt. Once safely into Czechoslovakia, Alicia, having lost all of her



money and the promise of an education someday, determined that her work with the Brecha was over. Once the group was turned over to the Brecha workers in Hungary, she would return to Lodz and resigned. She became quite ill, however, and, delirious with fever, awoke in a hospital run by the United Nations, cared for by American doctors. Diagnosed with pneumonia, she was told that she would be sent to a resort town in the Austrian Alps, to recuperate. Her stay would be in a camp for displaced persons, again operated by the United Nations. The UNRRA had taken several hotels in the Austrian town of Badgastein and converted them into residences for displaced persons from all over Europe, primarily Jews. Chapter 23 related Alicia's experiences during her stay at Hotel Straubinger, rooming with three other persons in rather cramped sleeping quarters, but, nevertheless, having the freedom to walk among the beautiful hills and mountain and knowing that food would be provided everyday.



# Chapters 24-Epilogue: School in Belgium; Coming Home; Epilogue

## Chapters 24-Epilogue: School in Belgium; Coming Home; Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 24 related Alicia's travel from Austria to Belgium and the stall in her efforts to travel to her final destination of Israel. Escorted by an American soldier, the displaced persons group left Salzburg by train, traveling in a closed freight car, because they would be entering Belgium illegally. Once in Belgium, they were placed in the care of the "Joint," The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and housed in an abandoned monastery. The plans to leave on the next leg of their journey were postponed, and the group settled in for a rather long stay. Alicia began Hebrew and English classes, along with other children, but, as the only Pole, she felt uncomfortable and rather an outcast. The living conditions were less than ideal, as the monastery was old and in disrepair, and Alicia looked for some way to leave. She located Marquain, an orphanage housing Jewish teenagers, and arranged to move there.

At Marquain, Alicia thrived, attending classes taught by instructors she loved. As well, she joined the Youth Aliyah, an organization founded in the 1930's by a woman who worked to rescue Jewish children from Nazi Germany and transport them to Israel. After the war, the organization's purpose remained the same for all surviving children. In classes, Alicia struggled, although she worked hard and overcame academic challenges as well as the rather social stigma of being the only Pole among the teens. During this time, she had a bittersweet experience involving an uncle that had survived. He had managed to track Alicia as far as the monastery and had left an envelope with one hundred dollars there, indicating that he was on the USS Liberty, currently docked there but soon to depart. Unfortunately, the ship had left by the time Alicia arrived at the dock to find him. Another uncle, however, was located in Haifa, and Alicia was anxious to meet him once she arrived in Israel. By the end of this chapter, it is the spring of 1947 and the group prepared to depart, lead by two young men, Avi and Amiram.

The trip to Israel was not pleasant. Loaded into trucks, the group was first taken to Marseilles, France, where they were then loaded onto an old boat. During the day, everyone had to stay below in order to avoid detection by the British naval ships, patrolling the Mediterranean. Without affidavits from the British, no Jew was supposed to enter Israel, and those caught had to go to camps in Cyprus and await permission from the British. Just as Haifa was in sight, the ship was stopped by British frigates, and, after a brief attempt to fight them off with cans and bottles, they were surrounded and escorted into Haifa harbor. Thus ended Chapter 25, with despair and dashed hopes.

In the epilogue, Alicia completed her story. The ship's occupants were taken to Cyprus aboard military prison ships to await the potential of permission to enter Israel. Alicia remained there eight months before being sent to an agricultural school outside of Tel

Aviv. She served in the Israeli Navy during the two year war for independence and in 1949, met an American engineer who was volunteering his time and expertise. Eventually, she and her husband moved to America and raised their three children. Alicia became active in many Jewish organizations and traveled throughout the U.S. to tell her story, eventually recording it permanently in her autobiography.



# Characters

## Alicia Jurman

Born in a mountainous region of Poland, Alicia enjoyed an idyllic childhood, even after moving to the city of Buczacz, where her father was the co-owner of a fabric factory. Once the Germans invaded Poland, however, Alicia's life was permanently altered. In a period of two years, her father and four brothers were all murdered and she and her mother were forced to hide in underground bunkers, forests, wheat fields, and barn lofts throughout Eastern Poland, often with no idea from where the next piece of bread or small potato might come. Through malnutrition, disease, dangerous escapes from Nazi captures, and the witnessing of her mother's murder, Alicia determined to survive. She demonstrated amazing ingenuity, changing languages and dialects to fool others, locating variety of places to hide, learning who to trust, and consistently helping others do the same. Along the way, she encountered compassionate Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, and other persecuted Jews who provided food, clothing, and intermittent shelter, but in the end, Alicia survived by using all of the mental and spiritual resources she had within herself. Despite the odds, Alicia set one final goal to get to Israel. This she accomplished, despite a temporary capture by the British and an eight-month stay in an internment camp in Cypress. Once in Israel, Alicia worked on a farm, completed brief duty with the Israeli Navy, and met and married an American engineer. Alicia eventually moved to America with her husband, raised her children, and began to tell her story throughout the country.

## Freida Kurtz Jurman

Freida Kurtz grew up in a rural area of Poland with a large extended family. Her parents and siblings remained in this part of Poland, but Freida married Alicia's father and moved to Buczacz with their four sons and daughter. She adjusted well to city life and to a comfortable lifestyle as the wife of a factory owner. It was important to Freida that her children receive proper educational and religious training, so , in addition to regular school, the children studied Hebrew and music as well, once they were old enough to do so. World War II and the ultimate occupation of Buczacz by the Germans changed everything. Forced to give up their beautiful home, the family was forced to move into the Jewish ghetto. One by one, each of the male family members was murdered, and the factory take over by Polish collaborators. Eventually, Freida and her only surviving child, Alicia, had to flee to the country, hiding in forests and wheat fields, while Alicia, disguised as a local, worked in fields for small amounts of food. She and Alicia returned to Buczacz once the Russian army had pushed the Germans out. Unfortunately, the Germans returned and Freida was shot, as Alicia watched. She was buried behind a house in the ghetto. Upon her second return to Buczacz, Alicia was able to find Freida's grave and moved her to the local Jewish cemetery. Though Freida was obviously not as strong in spirit and determination as Alicia, she urged Alicia to maintain her determination to survive, so that she could one day tell their story.



## Wujciu

In Polish, "Wujciu" means "uncle," and that is the name Alicia gave to the hermit who lived just outside of a large village. Because he suffered from epilepsy, the townspeople thought him possessed and avoided contact. Alicia discovered Wujciu recovering from a seizure outside his little cottage, where he tended his bees and small garden.

Desperate to find some place for herself and her mother through the winter months, Alicia convinced Wujciu to take them in. Wujciu, though unable to truly admit it, loved the company, and was loyal to his new Jewish house guests. Ultimately, he took in five additional Jews and assisted in hiding them when Ukrainian gangs came by. Everyone in the household scoured the countryside for food, either through work, begging, or stealing, and Wujciu shared his small store of supplies as well. When the Germans were finally defeated in Poland, and the Jews had left for their former towns, Wujciu is confronted by a local farmer and invited to go to the market in Buczacz. There, Alicia was waiting to give him new clothing, a hot bath, and meals at friend Bella's newly-opened restaurant. Alicia had sewn money into the seams of the new clothing, so that Wujciu would have a little extra for some luxuries in the future. Although Alicia never saw Wujciu again, she clearly states that he was a major factor in her survival, for she would not have survived that particular winter without his help.

## Milek

A friend of one Alicia's brothers, Milek managed to survive all of the purges of the ghetto in Buczacz and, filled with rage, joined a partisan group determined to attack the Germans whenever possible. As they attacked, they were able to steal weapons to carry on their work. At one point, when Alicia was lined up for execution in front of a ditch just outside of town, Milek and his group began to fire upon the Gestapo, and Alicia was able to escape death. They met sporadically thereafter, and, although a romantic relationship never developed, Alicia was clearly engaged in hero worship and fantasized a possible marriage to Milek, once the horror came to an end. Milek was ultimately killed.

## Bella

A large, red-headed Jewish woman, Bella arrived in Buczacz from another village ghetto and set up house with her daughter, Rachel, and son, Daniel. Her husband had been taken by the Russians to fight, and she had to assume he was dead. Bella was as ingenious as Alicia and managed to accumulate stores of food which she shared with Alicia and her mother. Upon Alicia's first return to Buczacz, Bella was not found, and Alicia assumed that the family had been killed. Upon her second return, however, Alicia finds Bella running a restaurant, with Daniel as her helper. Rachel had been killed. Bella chose to remain in Buczacz following the war, because life under Russian occupation, although not completely free, was certainly far better than the horrors of Nazi occupation.





## Tzivia

Tzivia was a female Jewish partisan who, after the war, ran the Brecha, an organization that illegally transported Jews to Israel. She was impressed with Alicia's ability to outsmart the enemy and her fluency in three languages, and recruited her to be a transporter. Alicia worked for Tzivia until she became ill and was taken to Austria to recuperate by a United Nations relief organization.

## Manka

Manka was the daughter of a well-to-do Ukrainian family that had sympathy for the Jewish plight. She befriended Alicia, when Alicia had managed to get some work in the family barn, milking and feeding cows. She invited Alicia into their home on several occasions, where Alicia was given meals, clothing and emotional support.

## Kola

A Russian soldier, Kola was a young man, caught by the Germans and imprisoned in a train station. He and his fellow soldiers were rescued by Alicia. She is taken to their headquarters, hailed a hero and given documents that identify her as a student, traveling back to Russia to study medicine. Alicia was able to use these documents several times as she moved about Poland.

## Slavka

A former classmate of Alicia's, Slavka was a Christian Pole whose family did not suffer during the Nazi occupation. Slavka, however, had always considered Alicia a good friend and during Alicia's hiding and desperation, provided winter clothing and other items. When Alicia and her mother first returned to Buczacz, they stayed at Slavka's home and were given the money to rent an apartment.

## Moshe

Moshe was the eldest Jurman son. He volunteered to go to Russia to learn a trade, but was placed in a labor camp there. Escaping and returning home, he was placed in prison, where he died.

## Bunio

The second Jurman son, Bunio was taken to a Nazi labor camp. When one of the prisoners escaped, the Nazis lined all of the young men up and shot every tenth one. Unfortunately, Bunio was a tenth one.



## Zachary

The third Jurman son, Zachary was hanged in front of the police station in Buczacz. After dark, Alicia and some friends cut him down and buried him in the Jewish cemetery, so that Freida would not have to see the horror.

## Herzl

The youngest Jurman child, Herzl became separated from Freida and Alicia but returned to Buczacz, to reunite. A former schoolmate turned him in to the police however and he was shot.

# Objects/Places

## Judenrat

This is a local group of Jewish men in Buczacz formed to act as liaison between the Jews and the Nazis.

## Buczacz

This is a small town in which Alicia lived, first occupied by Russians and then Nazis.

## Action

This is the Jewish term for raids by Nazi on the ghetto residents.

## Chortkov Prison

This is the Nazi prison in which Alicia was incarcerated and then released following the Nazi contamination of the drinking water with typhoid fever bacteria, in the hopes that those released would take the disease back to the ghetto.

## The Brecha

This is a secret organization of Jewish Zionists that secreted Jews into Israel, against British law.

## Banderovcy

These are gangs of Ukrainian youth who collaborated with the Nazis in persecution of the Jews.

## The Joint

This is the term for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a U.S.-funded organization that provided funds for Jewish transport to Israel.

## UNRRA

This is the United Nations Relief Association which assisted displaced persons in Europe following World War II.

## **Marquain**

This is a town in Belgium, housing an orphanage where Alicia lived just prior to her move to Israel.

## **Cyprus**

This is an island off the coast of Greece where Alicia spent 8 months, after having attempted illegal entry into Israel.

## **kibbutzim**

These are communal farms in Israel, where everyone shared work and profits.



# Themes

## Ingenuity

Everyone knows individuals whose ingenuity has allowed them to navigate through problems and situations by thinking "outside the box," engaging in truly creative problem-solving. Indeed, many of the best criminals in history have shown this character trait to extreme. Alicia Jurman personified ingenuity at its height, however, as she devised methods of survival in perhaps the most dangerous situation a human could face. While many Jews around her resigned themselves to their fates and ultimate death, this protagonist was determined to survive at all costs. She knew she would have to become as creative as possible, using her wits and devising the most ingenious solutions to all of the dangerous situations into which her ethnicity had thrown her. She made use of her mastery of languages to blend in with both Poles and Ukrainians, adopting dialects dependent upon the farm on which she worked. She stalked through the night hours to find barn lofts in which to sleep. She hid among wagons in the market, hopping out to sell whatever she had for food money. She hid in ravines and in the hollows of trees. She hitched rides with the enemy with preposterous stories of her background and need to get to the next village. She escaped certain death, influenced reluctant individuals to assist her, illegally transported Jews to Israel, began an orphanage which was actually financially prosperous, and ultimately got herself to Israel. All of this was accomplished by the time she was fifteen years of age. As one completes this autobiography, he or she will be completely astounded by the story, not simply as the suspenseful tale of a Holocaust survivor, but as an amazing study in creativity, wit, and ingenuity.

## Strength of the Human Spirit

Most of us move through life with a relative evenness of existence. There are crises and periods of struggle, to be certain, but we endure, resolve problems and issues, and move forward. For an individual who faces horrific events and sorrow, however, there are always two choices. One may choose to give in to the horror and grief and lose all quality of life and be ready to die. On the other hand, one may choose to call upon the deep reserves of spirit within himself, refusing to succumb to fear, despair, and destruction. Alicia Jurman chose the latter option. Despite the death of six family members, and despite being orphaned and homeless by the age of 14, she pulled upon those inner reserves and engendered a stubbornness and will to survive that few can imagine. This inner reserve of strength pushed her to move secretly about Poland, working in fields, stealing and begging for food, locating shelter for winter months, escaping certain death in prisons and before firing squads, and to emerge triumphant in her ultimate goal of emigration to Israel. As she accomplished all of this, she became a model for others, encouraging and assisting them however she might, so that they, too, could survive with their spirits intact. It is difficult to absorb all that Alicia endured, but



one must certainly stand in awe of a young teenager who managed to maintain such emotional strength through such adversity and horror.

## Man's Inhumanity

History is replete with examples of the ability of ideologies, religions, and power-hungry demagogues to carry out the wholesale extermination of entire groups of people whose religious, social and/or ethnic proclivities are deemed to be inferior or dangerous. Clearly, the most outrageous and publicized example in the modern world was the Holocaust or the Nazi persecution and extermination of the Jewish population throughout Europe. Certainly, anti-Semitism had existed throughout the centuries, as Christians blamed Jews for killing their Savior, and for their own financial difficulties as Jewish merchants, bankers and professionals thrived. This basic anti-Jewish sentiment was a prime emotional target for one such as Hitler who rose to power as Germany faced its most difficult economic situation in its history. The traditionally held beliefs in the superiority of the Caucasian, moreover, fed well into his inhumane policies and programs. From concentration to extermination, Germans and Christian collaborators in occupied countries took Jewish businesses and wealth, marched Jews to labor and concentration camps, and systematically tortured and murdered them by the millions. Alicia's story is a firsthand "on the ground" account of this genocide. Not just Nazis, but Polish and Ukrainian collaborators participated in this persecution, and willingly assisted the wholesale destruction of their former Jewish neighbors. They turned a blind eye, as did most of the world, to the immoral and horrific behaviors of the Nazis, although the evidence was clear. The question becomes, as Alicia Jurman aptly asks, whether man has learned anything from the Holocaust. Have we become more humane? Have we firmly stood and do we truly continue to stand firmly in opposition to genocide and inhumanity whenever and wherever it occurs? Do we act in accordance with our condemnation of inhumane treatment of man toward his fellow man?

# Style

## Perspective

As an autobiography, there is only one perspective for this tale, and that is the words and thoughts of Alicia Jurman. This horrific story of the fate of Jewish Poles during World War II is captured through the eyes of a young girl who experienced firsthand the systematic murder of each family member, until only she was left. Determined to survive and tell her story, Alicia traveled through Poland, using her wits and stubbornness to adapt to whatever situation into which she was thrust. Her opinions of the Nazis, the Russians, the Polish collaborators, and the Ukrainians are clear, as she navigates among all of these groups, often disguising her identity in order to meld into her geographic location. From grief to rage and final acceptance, Alicia moves through her early adolescent years, bearing unimaginable horrors and tragedies, and yet remaining focused on the goal of survival and ultimate emigration to the fledgling state of Israel. She has a special affinity and compassion for the child victims of the Holocaust, providing personal care and even opening an orphanage for these young survivors. Alicia has written this autobiography for two reasons. Her first reason is to be certain that the Holocaust is personalized for the world and community. The second reason is to demonstrate to everyone who reads her story that the human spirit can endure horrible adversity and yet not simply overcome it but indeed triumphed through this process. Alicia's story is obviously told in the first person, for it is her story, her adversities, her successes, failures, and her triumphs that comprise this amazing and unimaginable life of a young teenager determined to rise above all obstacles, persecutions, hatred, and terror to pursue a safe and productive life.

## Tone

The tone of Alicia's story is thoroughly mixed, though, overall, it is certainly subjective, as she relates the horrific tale of life under Nazi persecution and systematic destruction of the Jewish population in Poland and Europe as a whole. The emotional responses to injustice, torture, murder, and consuming fear included anger, despair, hatred, hope, determination, and spiritual strength and were all obviously pervasive throughout the work. Intermixed, however, the reader is able to perceive compassion, empathy, humor, and optimism, as Alicia experienced a rollercoaster existence of interminable suffering, as she loses her family and lifestyle, is forced into near starvation, imprisoned, threatened with death, and fights horrific diseases. She also receives intermittent relief from such suffering, as she was assisted by compassionate Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, and fellow Jewish survivors. For the most part, however, the bulk of this tale is suspenseful, horrifying, and filled with despair and fear.

If there is any redeeming tonal quality within this story, it is man's indestructible ability to hope that somehow, amidst the greatest devastation and degradation, there will be an end to suffering and a future that promises comfort and serenity.



## Structure

Alicia's story is, by necessity, chronological, as it is an autobiography of a Jewish child who survives the Nazi occupation of Poland and the German policy to rid Europe of all Jews. Alicia's life during this time can be divided into five sections.

The first section is brief, describing Alicia's life prior to the German and Russian invasion of Poland and the not unpleasant occupation of her town by the Russians. Section two begins with the breakdown of the treaty between Germany and Russia and the subsequent occupation of all of Poland by the Nazis. "Hell on earth" begins for Alicia and her family until only she and her mother remain alive. Their life becomes one horrific experience after another, with short respites, as others choose to assist them. Section three begins with the re-occupation by the Russians of Alicia's home town of Buczacz, allowing her to return for a short period of calm and safety, until the Germans return and kill her mother. Section four finds Alicia a vagabond once again, until the Germans are permanently expelled and Buczacz is once again in Russian hands. Returning again, Alicia finalizes her life in her town, realizing that this portion of her life is clearly over. Section five relates the activities of a more liberated Alicia, involving herself in illegal transport of Jews to Israel, and, ultimately, her roundabout emigration to Israel herself. Her goal achieved, Alicia moves onto the rest of her life, having achieved the safety and serenity she has sought.





## Quotes

"I realized that a person could actually become one of the living dead; could go on living but feel nothing, not pain not fear, not sorrow. I was very near to this state" (Chapter 10, pg. 93.)

"How can one describe the death march of what seemed to be a sea of men, women, and children? We were defenseless, demoralized people being pushed, hit, and even killed by the Germans and Ukrainians, who were driving us to some unknown destination" (Chapter 11, pg. 115.)

"Now that my mother had found me, all her remaining energy seemed to fade away. I had her lie down and rest her head in my lap so I could wrap my arms around her thing body...As she drifted off to sleep in my arms I made a silent promise that from then on I would guard her with my life" (Chapter 15, pg. 131.)

"Before I fell asleep I looked at the old man. I could see his face clearly. I wondered what this man's kindness would mean for us and what price he might have to pay for his good deed" (Chapter 13, pg. 157.)

"I deserved a day off; yes, I did. I was not going to feel guilty over it. And with that thought I rolled over and indulged myself in what was, for me, an unthinkable luxury: I took a nap on a bed" (Chapter 15, pg. 191.)

"I realized while walking home that there might be another goal to survival besides seeking revenge on the Germans and their collaborators. I realized that someday I might be able to live without fear and without hunger" (Chapter 15, pg. 193-94.)

"When I thought of freedom and trust in people, I questioned: How was one to be free of the pain of the loss of family, the tragic and total loss of those we loved so dearly? But for the time being at least, I was willing to try" (Chapter 15, pg. 205.)

"I remember passing our once-beautiful large synagogue, which had not been used for many years now, and seeing a woman leaning against the wall wailing, just crying out in agony. She looked to me like a branch dismembered from a tree, an arm without a body, a ind filled with grief, a bleeding heart, a walking tragedy" (Chapter 16, pg. 213.)

"I did not talk with her much, just as I didn't talk with the survivors I met on the streets. There was a feeling of embarrassment among us, a sense of guilt for having survived" (Chapter 16, pg. 214-15.)

"As I continued talking I realized that if I were to survive at all and escape from the swamp of anguish and despair, I would have to reach out to people, to those who survived like myself, and perhaps sometime in the future, to all people. I would not be able to continue to hate, because I knew in my young heart that hate could eventually destroy me" (Chapter 18, pg. 272.)



"I didn't know it then, but this act marked a new beginning. I was entering into a new phase of my life in the postwar "free" society where I would have to fight at almost every step to exist. For myself and others who survived, this struggle would be a daily task. We still had to carve out a place for ourselves, to fit in somewhere, where we could live in dignity and freedom, like other human beings" (Chapter 19, pg. 307.)

"Before the war, one out of every ten Poles was Jewish; now the Jews were almost all gone. Every one of us who survived was a reminder of Polish indifference at the best, often betrayal" (Chapter 31, pg. 339.)

"She was right. We had to leave Poland. All of us, we should all leave Europe; It was just one big Jewish cemetery" (Chapter 31, pg. 353.)

"I believe that the book will teach young people what enormous reserves of strength they possess within themselves" (Epilogue, pg. 433.)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the reasons Alicia gave for the willingness of her former neighbors and classmates to collaborate with the Nazis. Would you term these collaborators cowards or opportunists? Why?

There is a large teenage runaway population in America today. What techniques do they employ that are similar to Alicia's? What resources do they have that Alicia did not?

At one point Alicia considers placing a claim on her father's factory once the Nazis are permanently defeated. Why does she change her mind?

Do you believe the average 12-14 year old today could accomplish all that Alicia accomplished? Why or why not?

After World War II, many countries, including the U.S., signed agreements relative to humane treatment of both prisoners and civilian victims of war. Have the substances of these agreements been kept? Cite contemporary examples in your answer.

Of the various people who provided assistance to Alicia, choose two who perhaps impacted her survival the most. Describe how their assistance eased her condition and why she probably would not have survived without it.

Truly great books have a tendency to alter one's thinking, behavior, or beliefs. What has Alicia's story taught you about yourself, and has her story changed your thinking in any way and if so, in what ways?