

**Book Review – Survival in Auschwitz, By Primo Levi
Review by Walter S. Zapotoczny**

In the book *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi paints a detailed picture about living as a Jew in fascist Northern Italy and then being transferred to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. By 1943, the Nazis had moved south and set up holding camps around Italy to detain political prisoners and those of the Jewish nationality until they could be transported to established concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Dachau. This book depicts what happened to Levi after his arrest in 1943. Along with 650 others, he was loaded into a freight train for a four-day journey without food or water and without the liberty to leave the train at anytime. Upon their arrival at the camp of Auschwitz, Poland, the first of a precession of selections took place. The German SS Soldiers separated those they deemed capable of work from those they deemed incapable, such as women, children and elderly. Only 135 of the 650 from Levi's train were admitted into Auschwitz, the other 515 went immediately to the gas chambers. Levi recalled with remarkable accuracy the humiliation and confusion felt as he was forced to assimilate into his new surroundings. The food rations were too insufficient to stave off the hunger. Thousands of others around him were suffering and unavoidably dying as a result of this insufficient food supply. Although he was new to the camp, his experiences with others and his own observations told him that the Germans militant nature was at its worst. In order to outlive the war and survive, he found ways to maintain the illusion of usefulness with the least possible exertion. Any protest or disobedience from prisoners ended swiftly with beatings and death.

Levi described how many of the prisoners, after long hours of manual labor, would gather in a corner of the camp for a market. They would trade rations and stolen goods. Such goods as a spoon or buttons were as valuable as gold. The market followed all the classical economic laws. This seemed to show the ability of people to live and think and work in the most adverse of conditions. Inside the barbed wire, the prisoners had created their own social and economical world in order to endure. Primo Levi seems to write as a means in which he could express the physical trauma that he experienced as a survivor of Auschwitz and it's emotional consequences. He recalls for the reader the challenges that he faced on a daily and hourly basis to meet the basic needs necessary to remain alive. Levi depicts his time as a prisoner with a straightforward and narrative approach and with an almost unemotional tone that often disguises the horror of what he is describing.

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