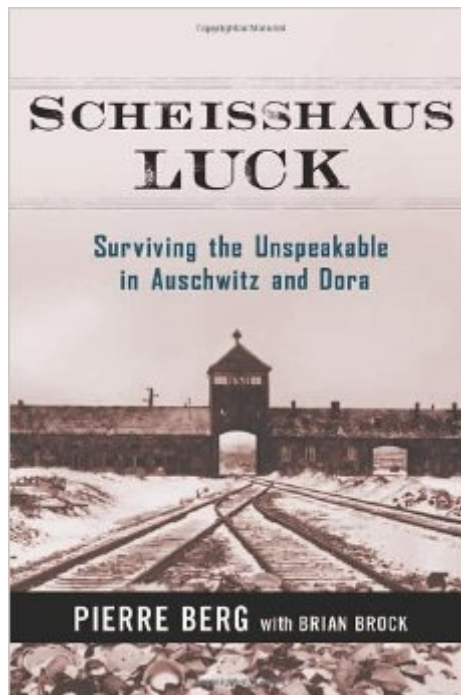


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Scheisshaus Luck: Surviving The Unspeakable In Auschwitz And Dora



Synopsis

In 1943, eighteen year old Pierre Berg picked the wrong time to visit a friend's house -- at the same time as the Gestapo. He was thrown into the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp. But through a mixture of savvy and chance, he managed to survive...and ultimately got out alive. "As far as I'm concerned," says Berg, "it was all shithouse luck, which is to say -- inelegantly -- that I kept landing on the right side of the randomness of life." Such begins the first memoir of a French gentile Holocaust survivor published in the U.S. Originally penned shortly after the war when memories were still fresh, Scheisshaus Luck recounts Berg's constant struggle in the camps, escaping death countless times while enduring inhumane conditions, exhaustive labor, and near starvation. The book takes readers through Berg's time in Auschwitz, his hair's breadth avoidance of Allied bombing raids, his harrowing "death march" out of Auschwitz to Dora, a slave labor camp (only to be placed in another forced labor camp manufacturing the Nazis' V1 & V2 rockets), and his eventual daring escape in the middle of a pitched battle between Nazi and Red Army forces. Utterly frank and tinged with irony, irreverence, and gallows humor, Scheisshaus Luck ranks in importance among the work of fellow survivors Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi. As we quickly approach the day when there will be no living eyewitnesses to the Nazi's "Final Solution," Berg's memoir stands as a searing reminder of how the Holocaust affected us all.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Let me first say I have read 100's of Holocaust survivor books so I do consider myself well educated in what happened in WWII. This book arrived in the advanced uncorrected proof for my review at

3pm. I read non-stop until 1:30am and finished the book. The story opens when an 18 yr old Pierre Berg, Gentile, non-Christian part of the French Resistance arrives at a friend's home to visit just as the Gestapo arrives. He is asked for his "papers" and of course he has false ones so he is taken away also. What he endures in Auschwitz is very accurate to well documented eye witness accounts that I have read. His treatment was brutal. When reading this keep in mind it is being told in the language of an 18yr old. He wrote down his account right after the war when the memories were fresh. Now in 2008 Pierre is getting the word out in English before all who were there are gone. I was amazed at his strength of spirit and will to live as he had the dead all around him. I cannot imagine doing some of the things he had to do. Picking up the dead, waking up with the dead, riding in a boxcar on top of mounds of dead bodies. But he kept on. During a long part of the story he meets up with an old classmate Hubert and they keep each other going. The punishment he got on his second day at Auschwitz after "pooping" aside the Block at night was horrific. I myself would not have survived that one act. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time in the beginning but as things play out he gets the lucky if you can call it breaks. He also had the advantage of speaking 4 languages and understanding more.

All memoirs written by concentration and death camp survivors speak the same broad language of horror. But each of them also brings the vision, the interpretation, of the individual author. For example, Eli Wiesel focuses on loss of faith in God; Primo Levi on loss of faith in humans; Viktor Frankl on the need of inmates to hang onto a sense of meaning; and so on. There are two characteristic signatures to Pierre Berg's recollections in *Scheisshaus Luck*. The first is its youthful style. One can almost imagine the story being told by an 18-year old. Indeed, it practically was. At the end of the war, 20-year old Berg's family immigrated to the US in search of treatment for his father's cancer. Almost immediately, he wrote down a version of his experiences in Auschwitz and Dora. The manuscript wasn't published at the time. But fifty years later, writer Brian Brock helped Berg revise the manuscript, retaining its youthful style, to produce *Scheisshaus Luck*. The second and more significant signature characteristic of this book is its deep appreciation of what Berg calls "s---house luck": the sheer good luck of "landing on the right side of the randomness of life." Time after time during his two year ordeal, Berg found himself at the right place and the right time--work details that earned him a bit of extra food, escaping the ultimate punishment when a clerical error had another prisoner instead of him executed--and it was this good but totally unplanned fortune that kept him alive. The tragedy, of course, is that so many of those around him (including the unfortunate prisoner hanged in his stead and a young girl Stella who plays a significant although

largely absent role in the story) wound up landing on the wrong side of the randomness of life.

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