

LEAP for LIFE by Rut Wermuth Burak

Rut Wermuth was born in the small town of Kolomyja, in Eastern Poland, in 1928. Her family, her whole world, was destroyed when the Nazis overran the town in 1941. Along with millions of other Jews, the thirteen year old became a hunted animal with only her wits and a false identity to aid her survival. In this memoir she vividly evokes the terrors of living through the war, utterly alone, as a slave worker in Germany.

Her story ranges across the next fifty years, a richly human picture of a life lived to the full despite the loss of everything she had once known. Against a background of the privations inflicted by Poland's Communist regime, Rut celebrates the fulfillment of creating her own family and achieving a satisfying career. Her happy pre-war childhood at the heart of a strong family, the joy of falling in love even while bombs fall on a slave labour camp and her reconnection with her Jewish roots are among the many experiences woven into the skilful narrative.

Then in the 1990s she learns that her adored older brother might also have survived the Holocaust. Was it possible that he had escaped to England, to become an internationally respected journalist with a name she does not recognise? As he fled Poland and the Nazis, Rut's brother had assumed the alias by which he became so widely known and retained for the rest of his life - Victor Zorza. How he survived, and his subsequent achievements and losses, are movingly recounted in the closing chapters of this book as the reunited brother and sister fill in for each other more than fifty missing years.

Victor believed that his sister would have been a better writer than he was had she enjoyed the same opportunities. She surely earns that confidence with this book and achieves her stated goal, to celebrate the courage of the many decent people without whose help she would not have lived to tell this tale.

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