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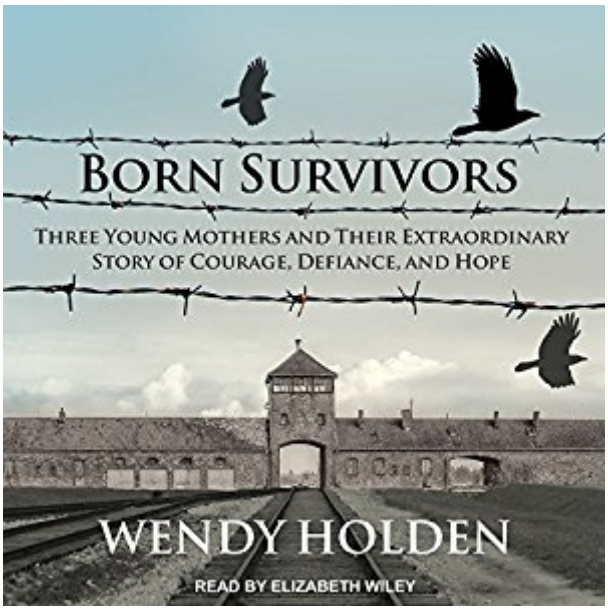
Born Survivors: Three Young Mothers And Their Extraordinary Story Of Courage, Defiance, And Hope



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Synopsis

Eastern Europe, 1944: Three women believe they are pregnant, but are torn from their husbands before they can be certain. Rachel is sent to Auschwitz, unaware that her husband has been shot. Priska and her husband travel there together, but are immediately separated. Also at Auschwitz, Anka hopes in vain to be reunited with her husband. With the rest of their families gassed, these young wives are determined to hold on to all they have left-their lives, and those of their unborn babies. Having concealed their condition from infamous Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, they are forced to work and almost starved to death, living in daily fear of their pregnancies being detected by the SS. In April 1945, Priska gives birth. She and her baby, along with Anka, Rachel, and the remaining inmates, are sent to Mauthausen concentration camp on a hellish train journey. Rachel gives birth on the train; Anka at the camp gates. All believe they will die-then a miracle occurs. The gas chamber runs out of Zyklon-B, and as the Allied troops near, the SS flee. Against all odds, the three mothers and their newborns survive their treacherous journey to freedom.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Loved this book. My Dad was part of the 11th Armored Division who freed these people. Everything Wendy described, was exactly how my Dad, now 94 remembered. I don’t remember him mentioning the babies, but the prisoners, the lice, and giving them I his rations was spot on. My Dad accompanied the photographer, as General Patton wanted this audacity fully documented, so that future generations would never allow something like this to happen again. When I was a child, he

had a huge box of photographs - showing them digging the trenches to bury the dead, to how disgusting the kitchen was when they arrived and how quickly the army chefs cleaned it up, and started preparing meals - mainly soups as there bodies couldn't handle meals. This book should be required reading for every high school student.

Staggering facts: In six years, the Nazis had killed approximately two thirds of the nine-and-a-half million Jews living in Europe, as well as millions of non-Jews. Only 300,000 of Poland's 3.3 million Jews had survived WWII. The United States eventually accepted some 400,000 refugees but denied many more access to a new life here. Unwelcome anywhere else in the world, many Polish Jews had little alternative but to return to what was by then a Soviet puppet state.With survival admittedly just a matter of luck, this entirely densely written work of non-fiction, tackled perfectly by Author Wendy Holden, takes us from the beautiful, healthy, grateful, wealthy lives of three Jewish women and their husbands and into their fearful, imprisoned, tortured, starved, sickened, unfathomable life of horrors endured in various concentration camps, German factories, and slave labor camps over Europe under Nazi rule while pregnant and miraculously postbirth. This is an exhausting story of survival, only possible due to people of compassion, mothers who fought for their lives and the lives of their babies, and thankfully American allied intervention and liberation in May 1945, "those tanks with the white stars." The rebuilding of lives where towns and sometimes entire families were destroyed is unimaginably heartbreaking. The reunions between the grown children and their aged liberators are heartbreaking and inspirational. The visiting of Mauthausen where three babies were secretly born and now are adult orphans walking arm and arm as forever 'siblings of the heart' is so incredibly empowering -- Mark, Eva and Hana. I always feel a duty to read Holocaust books; I'm relieved I have finished this one. It's amazing to hear these stories of courageous freedoms. I'm just so fiercely angry they ever had to be written at all.

Very fascinating depressing and uplifting book about young women who were slaves for Hitler's Germany, but still managed to survive. The intensity of believing they would meet with their husbands and much of the time that they would survive is amazing. The author's descriptions of the concentration camps, the bunks, the inmates were exceptional. I have read many books about the Holocaust, but this one I truly recommend. I particularly enjoyed reading about the years after they were liberated. Some happy and exciting happenings occurred and rather than describing them, read the book.

ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœGood morning pretty lady, are you pregnant?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ These where the infamous words from Josef Mengele, the so-called Angel of Death, at Auschwitz IIÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œBirkenau concentration camp. If found to be pregnant then - with a flick of MengeleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s glove - the women would have been taken away to face certain death in the gas chambers.Born Survivors is the story of Priska, Rachel and Anka, three women who had never met but were transported to the camp late on during the war. The book tells the story of how at the beginning they believed they would be fine and survive, then as the Nazis moved in to their respective countries how they then tried to stay free from capture.All three young women were married by the time they entered Auschwitz that day in 1944. Little did they know what was to lie ahead for each of the three women and this is their story in a new book Born Survivors by Wendy Holden.All three women were pregnant as infamous trains transported them to be met by brutal SS guards with their ferocious guard dogs. During the coming hours they were stripped and their heads shaved before standing naked as Mengele went through the selection process. When each of the women were asked if they were pregnant they instinctively replied ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“NeinÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• which saved them from the gas chambers.All three women who were separated from their husbands with no knowledge of their whereabouts were deemed fit for slave labour. None of them knew from one day to another whether they would face being selected for the gas chamber or work.This was just the beginning for each of the three women. Their food rations could only be described as dishwater and crumbs of bread. Living conditions deteriorated by the day as did their health. Priska, Rachel and Anka managed to hide their pregnancies from their fellow inmates, knowing if they were found they would face certain death at the hands of Nazi killing machine.The emaciated and lice-ridden women faced afurther ordeal as they were selected to help the German war machine by being transferred to Freiberg working as slave labours in a factory making parts for aircraft. During their time here the allies were advancing and bombing raids were daily, during which the women were locked in a room on the top floor of the factory while their Nazi captors hid in shelters. As their health deteriorated and being so thin the three women still managed to hide their secret. Rachel who shared a bunk with her sisters did not even dare tell them out of fear.Then on April 12 1945 Priska gave birth to Hana on a plank laid on a table. The Nazi captors even joked and had bets as to what the sex of the baby would be.With little food and water, the newborn was vastly underweight at 3 pounds. Then along with the other 1000 or so women they were evacuated from the factory as the Russians and Americans closed in. They were boarded onto trains with little or no food and water. How mother and baby survived on meagre rations living in rags at this time no-one knew. Nor did they know their destination with Allied

bombing raids causing great confusion as bombs fell.Rachel weighing under 70lbs and in one of the crammed open coal wagons with little food and water she gave birth to a baby boy she named Mark. They were halfway through their 17 day journey in hellish conditions when she went into labour, with only a rusty blade to sever the umbilical cord. In hope of saving her baby she told her guards the baby was born on HitlerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s birthday (April 20), so the SS guards joked ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœanother Jew for the FuhrerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢.Their final destination was the infamous Mauthausen Camp (known as the Bone-Grinder) situated in Austria close to the Danube. This camp had the reputation of being the final destination - once through the gates you entered hell never to leave alive. Many in Mauthausen died from the appalling conditions including hard labour, lack of food, illness, being gassed or from the sheer brutality of the SS guards.It was on the final part of the journey to the camp that Anka gave birth to baby Eva on the back of a cart filled with the dead or dying women after being pulled off the train.The war was close to its end and the Allies were closing in on the Nazi regime and the hilltop camp. The guards herded many of the latest arrivals into the gas chambers only to realise they had run out of Zyklon B crystals used to gas those they wanted to kill.Within days the Americans arrived, spearheaded by the US Thunderbolts headed by Sgt Albert J. Kosiek a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge. A hardened soldier, he had seen and witnessed much but nothing could prepare him or his men for what they found at Mauthausen. Many of the men broke down when the sheer horror unfolded in front of their eyes. The war was finally over, Priska, Rachel and Anka though nothing more than skeletons had survived with their babies despite the horrors that they were born into. Born Survivors indeed.Many of the American servicemen who liberated the camp refused to speak of what they found at Mauthausen. The sheer horror would never leave them and would haunt them for the rest of their lives.The three mothers who defied death to give life were eventually allowed to leave and head home to try and find their husbands and rebuild their lives. Their journeys would end in heartbreak as their husbands were never to return and their homes and possessions all gone. Some of the women would be ostracised and had to move on to find a new home.Priska, Rachel and Anka are sadly no longer alive but their memory lives on in their children Hana, Mark and Eva, almost certainly the last living survivors of the Holocaust.Just very recently, on 10 May 2015, the Austrian authorities marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Mauthausen in the presence of relatives of survivors and those still alive who helped liberate the camp. Also present were Hana, Mark and Eva, celebrating the day the Americans arrived to set them free.The legacy of Priska, Rachel and Anka will live on through their children and their grandchildren and they deserve that.Born Survivors is a book of defiance, courage and hope. The author Wendy Holden deserves the plaudits for the

painstaking research for this book and also the accolades that surely will come.For this reviewer I shed tears at the close of this book and the profound effect it has had on me. I for one will remember Priska, Rachel and Anka and their courage to defy death to bring life.I would like to thank both Wendy Holden and the publishers Sphere (Little, Brown Book Group) for giving me the opportunity of reviewing one of the most important and historically significant books of 2015. This is a book that deserves to be read.

I have read many books about survivors of the Holocaust but I would have to rate this book as "tops" in all of my reading. It was a fascinating story. It was so well researched and informative but not just like reading an encyclopedia of facts but rather it was so personal in the presentation of the stories of these 3 women. I learned so much about that time period that I was not aware of even with the abundance of reading that I have done about that time in history. I highly recommend this book! It made me laugh, cry and cringe in pain. It filled my mind with important historical and personal information--"lest we ever forget" what happened to millions of Jewish people in Europe in the 1940's at the hands of the Nazi Government in Germany.

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