

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Heather Morris is a native of New Zealand, now resident in Australia. For several years, while working in a large public hospital in Melbourne, she studied and wrote screenplays, one of which was optioned by an Academy Award-winning screenwriter in the US. In 2003, Heather was introduced to an elderly gentleman who 'might just have a story worth telling'. The day she met Lale Sokolov changed both their lives. Their friendship grew and Lale embarked on a journey of self-scrutiny, entrusting the innermost details of his life during the Holocaust to her. Heather originally wrote Lale's story as a screenplay - which ranked high in international competitions - before reshaping it into her debut novel, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*.

- Amazon.com

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel about Lale when he was first introduced, as he arrived in Auschwitz? How did your understanding of him change throughout the novel?
2. What qualities did Lale have that influenced the way he was treated in the camp? Where did those qualities come from?
3. Survival in the camp depended on people doing deeds of questionable morality. Lale became the tattooist, but how did Gita's choices affect her survival? What about her friend who befriended a Nazi?
4. Inmates in the concentration camp had to make life-or-death decisions every day. Why did some make the "right" decisions and survive while others did not?
5. Discuss some of the small acts of humanity carried out by individuals in *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. How did these small acts of kindness have greater implications? Did it make you reconsider what you believe to be brave or heroic? Did this make you think differently about the impact of your own everyday actions?
6. *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* makes clear that there were also non-Jewish prisoners in the camp. How did the treatment of Jews differ from that of non-Jews? How did differences manifest themselves?

7. Had Gita and Lale met in a more conventional way, would they have developed the same kind of relationship? How did their circumstances change the course of their romance?
8. In what ways were the relationships between Gita and her friends different from the usual friendships between teenage girls? In what ways were they similar?
9. In what ways was Lale a hero? In what ways was he an ordinary man?
10. Lale faced danger even after the camp was liberated. How did his experiences immediately after liberation prepare him for the rest of his life?
11. How does *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* change your perceptions about the Holocaust in particular, and war in general? What implications does this book hold for our own time?

- <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11363-tattooist-of-auschwitz-morris?start=3>

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

Australian author Morris' first novel is based heavily on the memories of Lale Sokolov, a Slovakian Jew who spent almost three years in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. For most of that time, he tattooed numbers onto the arms of fellow prisoners, one of whom he would later marry. Like Lale, Gita was Slovakian, and with some maneuvering by him, she was assigned to a relatively safe job, working as a secretary in the administrative building. Morris tells their story in rapidly moving present tense, in which the horrors of the camps contrast with the growing love between them. Lale comes across as a sharp-witted businessman with a touch of the con artist, smuggling out jewels and currency in sausages and chocolate. Although one might suspect that there's far more to his past than is revealed here, much of Lale's story's complexity makes it onto the page. And even though it's clear that Lale will survive, Morris imbues the novel with remarkable suspense. -- Margaret Quamme (Reviewed 8/1/2018) (Booklist, vol 114, number 22, p41).

### Publisher's Weekly

Based on a true story, Morris's debut fictionalizes the romance between two concentration camp prisoners during WWII. In 1942, Lale, a Slovakian Jew, is given the position of tattooist, tasked with numbering the arm of every new inmate who enters Auschwitz-Birkenau. He uses his position to procure black market items, which he trades away in return for favors. One day, he tattoos the arm of a young woman named Gita and promptly falls in love with her. They begin meeting on Sundays, the only day of rest in the camps. He vows to Gita that he will marry her when they are freed, a boast that Gita is dubious of but nevertheless clings to. Lale even becomes something of a guardian angel to Gita, providing her with penicillin when she contracts typhus. Separated at the end of the war by the fleeing SS, Lale and Gita set out to find one another again in postwar Europe. Too many, this book will be most appreciated for its powerful evocation of the everyday horrors of life as a prisoner in a concentration camp, while others will be heartened by the novel's message of how true love can transcend even the most hellishly inhuman environments. This is a perfect

novel for book clubs and readers of historical fiction. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed 07/30/2018) (Publishers Weekly, vol 265, issue 31, p).

### Library Journal

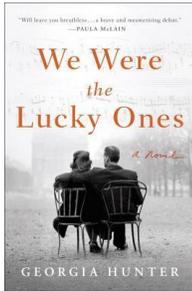
Fifteen years ago, Australia-based writer Morris was introduced to Holocaust survivor Ludwig (Lale) Sokolov, a Slovakian Jew who was forced to tattoo his fellow prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau. This novel builds on interviews she conducted with Sokolov, portraying his efforts to assist others though surrounded by horrific brutality and his vow to help a young woman named Gita survive the camps and marry her. Already an international best seller; with a 20,000-copy hardcover and 100,000-copy paperback first printing. --Barbara Hoffert (Reviewed 04/15/2018) (Library Journal, vol 143, issue 7, p47).

### Kirkus Reviews

An unlikely love story set amid the horrors of a Nazi death camp. Based on real people and events, this debut novel follows Lale Sokolov, a young Slovakian Jew sent to Auschwitz in 1942. There, he assumes the heinous task of tattooing incoming Jewish prisoners with the dehumanizing numbers their SS captors use to identify them. When the Tätowierer, as he is called, meets fellow prisoner Gita Furman, 17, he is immediately smitten. Eventually, the attraction becomes mutual. Lale proves himself an operator, at once cagey and courageous: As the Tätowierer, he is granted special privileges and manages to smuggle food to starving prisoners. Through female prisoners who catalog the belongings confiscated from fellow inmates, Lale gains access to jewels, which he trades to a pair of local villagers for chocolate, medicine, and other items. Meanwhile, despite overwhelming odds, Lale and Gita are able to meet privately from time to time and become lovers. In 1944, just ahead of the arrival of Russian troops, Lale and Gita separately leave the concentration camp and experience harrowingly close calls. Suffice it to say they both survive. To her credit, the author doesn't flinch from describing the depravity of the SS in Auschwitz and the unimaginable suffering of their victims—no gauzy evasions here, as in *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. She also manages to raise, if not really explore, some trickier issues—the guilt of those Jews, like the tattooist, who survived by doing the Nazis' bidding, in a sense betraying their fellow Jews; and the complicity of those non-Jews, like the Slovaks in Lale's hometown, who failed to come to the aid of their beleaguered countrymen. The writing is merely serviceable, and one can't help but wish the author had found a way to present her material as nonfiction. Still, this is a powerful, gut-wrenching tale that is hard to shake off. (Kirkus Reviews, August 1, 2018).

## READALIKES

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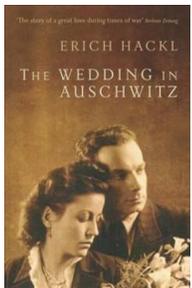
### ***We Were the Lucky Ones* by Georgia Hunter**

A novel based on the true story of a Jewish-Polish family recounts how the Kurcs are scattered throughout the world by the horrors of World War II and fight respective hardships to survive, reach safety and find each other.



### ***Lilac Girls* by Martha Hall Kelly**

On a September day in Manhattan in 1939, twenty-something Caroline Ferriday is consumed by her efforts to secure the perfect boutonniere for an important French diplomat and resisting the romantic advances of a married actor. Meanwhile across the Atlantic, Kasia Kuzmerick, a Polish Catholic teenager, is nervously anticipating the changes that are sure to come since Germany has declared war on Poland. As tensions rise abroad - and in her personal life - Caroline's interest in aiding the war effort in France grows and she eventually comes to hear about the dire situation at the Ravensbruck all-female concentration camp. At the same time, Kasia's carefree youth is quickly slipping away, only to be replaced by a fervor for the Polish resistance movement. Through Ravensbruck - and the horrific atrocities taking place there told in part by an infamous German surgeon, Herta Oberheuser - the two women's lives will converge in unprecedented ways and a novel of redemption and hope emerges that is breathtaking in scope and depth.



### ***The Wedding in Auschwitz* by Erich Hackl**

Rudi Friemel fights for the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. When the Republican Front collapses, he is interned in France. In 1941, the German prisoners are offered the choice of repatriation, which Rudi agrees to. He and Marga are briefly re-united, and a child is conceived, before he is taken to a Gestapo prison in Vienna.