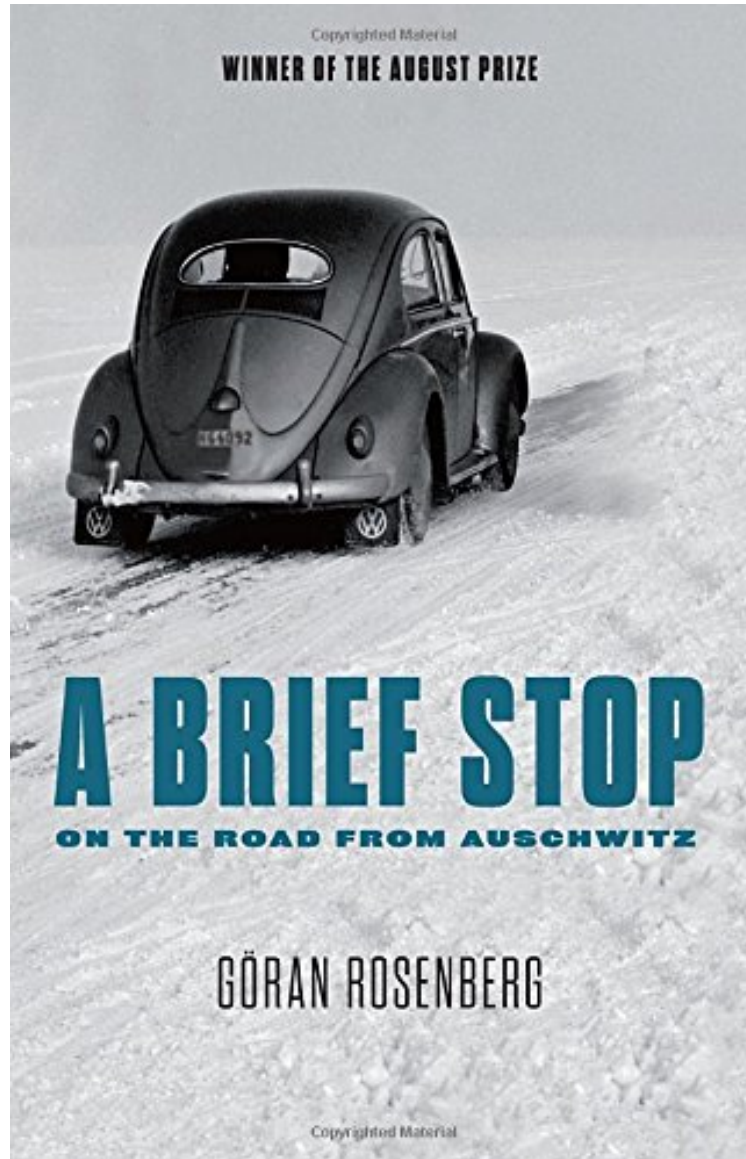


(Free pdf) A Brief Stop On the Road From Auschwitz

## A Brief Stop On the Road From Auschwitz

*Goran Rosenberg*

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**Goran Rosenberg : A Brief Stop On the Road From Auschwitz** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Brief Stop On the Road From Auschwitz:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. In order to remember we must be able to imagineBy aile.verteAlthough the post-war fate of Holocaust survivors has been receiving more attention in recent years --- for instance, Dan Stone's book on the final days of the camps, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* or Michael Brenner's edited volume of essays and survivors' statements, *After the Holocaust* --- and

while many memoirs, including Primo Levi's account of his circuitous path to freedom, touch on the days directly following the camps' liberation (often followed by another form of confinement, whether for reasons of quarantine or political reasons), Gran Rosenberg's book is unique in addressing the issue of day-to-day survival in an increasingly "normal" and forgetful world. Rosenberg is a subtle thinker and a skillful narrator. He structures the narrative of his father's survival around the Place --- a small town in Sweden where his father's migratory path came to a stop, where he found a job, settled down with his wife, and had children, that is, where the narrator was born. The Place is a focal point of shared experience, from which the narrator proceeds to try to understand his father's life journey. Seen through the eyes of a child, the Place and its geography, with its factory, its train station, the 26-meter tall bridge over the canal, the pine forest separating the town from the seashore, with its modern housing and rowanberry trees, become almost mythical. At the same time, the Place is also emblematic, a Swedish "Midwest" with its small-town hopes and joys, problems and prejudices; a town that will hardly figure on any political map; the periphery from where to observe events that happen "out there" in the world. It is starting from this Place that Rosenberg presents his father: we get to know him little by little the way he did as a child, gradually learning about the shadows that haunted his existence. Rosenberg writes in second person singular, like a letter addressed to his father or as if a surviving part of an absent conversation. To retrace his father's journey, Rosenberg relies on scraps of memory, his own and of surviving relatives, on family letters and documents, and on archival and field research. And so he reconstructs the conditions of the Lodz Ghetto by referencing the miraculously preserved Ringelblum archives; or scours extant transport lists and other documents to pinpoint, as accurately as possible, the dates of his father's "delivery" to Auschwitz, then transfer to the slave labor camp in Braunschweig, and the complicated path, via Ravensbrück and Wöbbelin, to liberation. Rosenberg is keenly aware of the abyss that separates the knowledge we can glean from dates and the experience of a prisoner being transported to the unknown: "On your journey exact dates have no function." Dates are for us, for the researcher; they are like anchors, something concrete to hold on to in our effort to understand; they also counteract the "precise figures and arbitrary abbreviations [which] are the crowbars of Nazi euphemism" (p. 60): I note down the exact figures and dates, in fact I scour the archives and sources for the exact figures and dates, because I want to reconstruct your world as you see it before its liquidation, and I need something to build it with, and I don't know what else I can understand. But I soon notice that the exact numbers and dates merely reconstruct the widening gulf between what's happening around you and what can be understood. (p. 59) The gulf between the anonymity of the number and the visceral quality of experience must be bridged through narrative and imagination --- against the Nazi effort to employ seemingly precise records in the service of dehumanization and obliteration. The failure to imagine is one of the implicit themes of this book: it is a failure of imagination that is responsible for forgetfulness and for the breakdown of communication between survivors and those who know of concentration camps only second-hand. Gran Rosenberg puts his finger on the paradox of the survivor: in order to live on, the survivor needs to be able to push aside the horror, to "forget" the unforgettable; but in order to be able to repress the dark memories and to live, the survivor needs the world to remember: "... those of you who have survived have no reason to doubt that the world afterward is no longer the same as the world before. It's impossible to think anything else. It's impossible to think you've all survived in order for the world to forget what it's just been through and to go on as if nothing has happened. There must be some point to the fact that you've survived, since the main point of the event you've survived was that none of you were supposed to survive... ... Why me and not the others? Naturally it's also an unbearable thought, which has to be pushed aside sooner or later if surviving is to turn into living. So I think it's initially pushed aside by the assurance that you haven't survived for yourselves but for others, too; that you're the traces that must not be eradicated, and that you therefore owe a particular duty to the life you've been granted... ... Like Lot's wife, people in your situation can go on living only if they don't turn around and look back, because like Lot's wife, you risk being turned to stone by the sight. Nor, however, can you go on living if nobody sees and understands what it is you've survived and why it is you're still alive, in spite of everything. I think the step from surviving to living demands this apparently paradoxical combination of individual repression and collective remembrance. You can look forward only if the world looks backward and remembers where you come from, and sees the paths you pursue, and understands why you're still living." (pp. 278-9) I find this to be one of the crucial passages in the book and a key insight into the dysfunction of our own world. The experience of a Holocaust survivor is an extreme experience which, if we accept our responsibility of imagining it, should be a prism through which to view, and relate to, the world. Is not the mistreatment of refugees, for instance, reminiscent of the often-judgmental treatment concentration camp survivors met with in displaced persons' camps? Does not the facility with which business often trumps humanitarian concerns or the xenophobic rhetoric of individuals or right-wing governments sound all too familiar? Although Rosenberg does not raise these issues directly, it is clear that broader implications of his father's experience are on his mind. He limits his considerations to the Place and evokes what might seem like an unrelated thread in his story: the environmental degradation of this seaside locality through industrial ground pollution and sewage run-off leading to the paving over of what once was a charming beach resort and turning it into an industrial harbor. Like the inhabitants of Wöbbelin or Braunschweig, living their lives next door to Nazi horror, the inhabitants of the Place, and the authorities, chose passivity and inaction allowing, in this case, environmental crimes to be perpetrated. It goes without saying that there

is no question of establishing equivalence between the different conducts; however, what is important, I think, is not being afraid to recognize recurring patterns of behavior. Gran Rosenberg's book is an exemplary effort of imagination: through patient interpretation and piecing together of a network of facts, memories, gestures, he reconstructs his father's harrowing experience and, in a sober, unsentimental narrative, identifies the different forces -- social, political, historical, etc. -- that come together to propel this particular destiny to its particular end. Some reviewers have remarked on the shortcomings of the translation. My sense was that the translation was well done and if anything perhaps too accurate: I felt that the small grammatical imperfections reflected the translated and re-translated text; they are most often encountered in the narrator's parents' letters, written in Polish, translated by a third party into Swedish, and then, for this edition, into English. It is possible that the Polish is already inflected, imperfect; it is peppered with Yiddish, later Swedish, words whose meanings blur and intertwine. As a Polish speaker, I could sometimes detect the Polish idiom beneath the English translation, and I thought this was the point. There are subtle layers in the prose; it is multi-voiced: there is the perspective of the child, very much focused on sensory imagination; there is the voice of the mature narrator -- a researcher, thinker, who tells the story of his own quest among the vestiges of a vanished world; there are the voices of his parents, speaking in the fragments of correspondence written at different times and in different circumstances; and there is the occasional snippet of officious language of the bureaucracy, Nazi or otherwise. The translator did an excellent job giving each of these voices a unique tonality. That the translator's name is Sarah Death I could not but find symbolic: combining a common Jewish girl's name and the tragic destiny of a nation. 19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. It makes a haunting question By Per Kurowski I am not a Jew, but my father, as a Polish soldier was on the first train of prisoners to Auschwitz, where he spent years having to photograph many horrors. And my father, after the war, was also able to arrive to Sweden, about or even the same day as Rosenbergs father and where he met my mother. And I recently read this book in Swedish, and was equally moved by it. Now I bought it in English to share it with my non-Swedish speaking friends. For me, the most nerve-wracking part of the book is the description of how in the Polish ghettos a Jewish Council had to wrestle with the decision to elaborate or not, a list with names of thousand of children and grandparents to be delivered to the Nazis, to certain death, in order for some to have a chance to survive. In the Lodz ghetto they did that, and Rosenberg and many other survived. Would you really want to survive in a world that requires you do that? asks the author and it is a truly haunting question that will stay with you. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. If you've had enough "holocaust stories", don't bother. But this is a different approach... By Robert Liss Well written and just frightening... We are all disconnected from our parents and their life experiences until much later in our lives. Rosenberg learns about his parents' history and their struggles in a level of detail that maybe nobody really wants to know; and he unravels some secrets and gets angry along the way. If you've had enough "holocaust stories", don't bother. But this is a different approach...

This shattering memoir by a journalist about his fathers attempt to survive the aftermath of Auschwitz in a small industrial town in Sweden won the prestigious August Prize On August 2, 1947 a young man gets off a train in a small Swedish town to begin his life anew. Having endured the ghetto of Lodz, the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the slave camps and transports during the final months of Nazi Germany, his final challenge is to survive the survival. In this intelligent and deeply moving book, Gran Rosenberg returns to his own childhood to tell the story of his father: walking at his side, holding his hand, trying to get close to him. It is also the story of the chasm between the world of the child, permeated by the optimism, progress, and collective oblivion of postwar Sweden, and the world of the father, darkened by the long shadows of the past.

"Beautifully wrought... One of the great merits of Rosenbergs book is the way he contrives to relive his fathers life forwards, not prejudging events through the prism of the outcome, but imbuing each stage of what he calls 'the project' that is, his parents aim of reconstructing a normal life in Sweden with a kind of tender hope... Written with tender precision, A Brief Stop on the Road From Auschwitz is the most powerful account I have read of the other death the death [that comes] after the camps." The International New York Times [Rosenbergs] father, David, was born in Lodz in Poland and made the rare journey not just to Auschwitz but from it in the final, desperate year of World War II. It is this last experience that is at the heart of A Brief Stop on the Road From Auschwitz, the result of years of painstaking digging. It is an affecting book, a sons letter to his father asking for knowledge lyrically rendered. It is impossible to read this enormously touching work without contemplating the present day. The Wall Street Journal "This exquisitely wrought book is, among other things, a meditation on the workings of memory and history in one mans life." Los Angeles of Books "A searing survivor's tale told by a son. ... A deeply felt story and a sobering reminder of the long shadows of the Holocaust." Kirkus s "Brilliantly sorrowful." Booklist "[Gran] Rosenberg wields deep research and literary empathy in writing about the horrors his parents had lived through before he was born." The Boston Globe "Wonderful, incisive... A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz part history, part memoir, part essay on the meaning of survival insists that the Holocaust didnt end in 1945. The book challenges the powerful redemptive narrative offered by even official histories." Words Without Borders "[A] chiaroscuro composed of more shade than

light but one that manages to be all the more revealing because of it. Rosenberg floors us with a shock conclusion and provides us with a wealth of insight on the way to it. "The Daily Beast" Destined to become a classic... Gran Rosenberg has written a calm yet passionate account of events after Auschwitz, a memoir that should be read by anyone who ponders the infinite questions of good and evil... With *A Brief Stop on the Road From Auschwitz*, Rosenberg has not only given us a necessary book but, by confronting unspeakable sorrow with courage and reason, he has created a masterpiece marked by great intelligence and equally great emotional intensity. "Arts Fuse" The author captivately retraces his father's road to Sweden, starting with deportation to Auschwitz... *A Brief Stop on the Road From Auschwitz*... is an unusual work... heart-rending. "Washington Jewish Week" A profoundly moving act of remembering... a searing investigation of complicity, guilt, and shame. "The Sunday Times" [A] towering and wondrous work about memory and experience, exquisitely crafted, beautifully written, humane, generous, devastating, yet somehow also hopeful. "Financial Times" In conjuring up the indescribable and the unimaginable, Rosenberg's story is utterly unforgettable, breathing life into the painful experiences of a couple who... were intent on making a success of survival after the world had turned its back on them. It is a chilling reminder of how the consequences of war long outlived the ceasefire, leaving indelible marks on family life in the decades that followed. "The Independent" In this memoir, author and journalist Gran Rosenberg walks with his father David through the darkness and light of their lives in postwar Sweden... The quiet, reflective, elegiac quality of Rosenberg's retrieval of memory, of the meaning of what it is to be a survivor, of his father's last days when the shadows of the past catch up with him and kill him, gives grace to the pained, weary traveler on his long journey. "The Times (UK)" This brilliant, touching and heart-wrenching story has rightly been compared to the work of Primo Levi in its treatment of the never-ending suffering of so many Holocaust survivors. "The Jewish Chronicle" Moving and unflinchingly honest... [Rosenberg's] story will stay with you long after you've closed the book. "The Irish Examiner" Artfully constructed... poignant, but not sentimental... [m]ore than mere reportage, this book is also a venture into the darkest places of the human spirit. "The Tablet (UK)" Compelling and poetic. "The Huffington Post" [A] t once remarkable testimony and remarkable literature... Brimming with duty-bound love but inescapably tragic at its core, *A Brief Stop on the Road From Auschwitz* is a tour de force fully on par with Primo Levi's "If This Is a Man" and other literary classics of the Holocaust. Associated Press Rosenberg's heart-rending account of his (yet-to-become) parents' forced journey from their home in Lodz squarely faces the reader with the tragic question whether a common young man's life, though miraculously delivered from the horrors of the Holocaust but finding itself dispossessed of everything home, means can still overcome the scars of the past and retain the sanity and means for a life worth living. Not often can a prosaic prose embed such piteous sorrow, and human tragedy be so starkly revealed. Sari Nusseibeh, author of *Once Upon a Country, A Palestinian Life*. Subtle, chilling, and utterly absorbing, Goran Rosenberg's memoir is also an excavation of a grueling post-war, too often hidden from history. With a novelist's instinct, Rosenberg travels amongst truths that want to be forgotten in Poland, in Germany and in Sweden. This is a masterly and moving book that brings the great Sebald to mind. Lisa Appignanesi, author of *Losing the Dead* Every road from Auschwitz is an individual miracle unto itself, writes Goran Rosenberg, and in this gripping and poetic memoir he imagines his way into the dark miracle of his own father's experiences during and after the Holocaust. Born in peaceful Sweden, Rosenberg tries to make sense of the history that allowed him to grow up there, years after his father had suffered through the horrors of the Lodz ghetto and the concentration camps. From its lyrical opening pages to its shocking conclusion, *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz* is an unforgettable book about memory, grief, and fate. Adam Kirsch, Senior Editor at *The New Republic* and columnist for *Tablet* "Rosenberg's book left me stricken with sorrow and overwhelmed with grateful wonder. I know of no book that tells the story so forcefully of how, for those who survived Auschwitz, even this experience had to be treated as a single episode in the course of a full life, regardless of the camps' malignant persistence at the heart of identity. With its hypnotic, propulsive sentences, its ruthless disavowal of sentiment, and its inspiring filial compassion, *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz* manages to make the concentration camp story feel absolutely new again: vivid, shocking, and an urgent call upon our powers of empathy for the world today." George Prochnik, author of *The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World* More than just the survival story of his father, it is great literature. At times his book is pervaded by an evil sadness, a biting wit that reveals the injustices that have befallen his father, firmly biting away until he has deconstructed them and bares all their repulsiveness. Frankfurter Allgemeine Rosenberg: a new Primo Levi. *Volkskrant* (The Netherlands) Passionate, tragic, exemplary and necessary. *Livres Hebdo* (France) A merciless but loving masterpiece. *De Standaard* (Belgium) Rosenberg: a new Primo Levi. *Volkskrant* (The Netherlands) Great literature. *FAZ* (Germany) Brilliant, unsentimental and suggestive. I was very moved by this darkly shimmering tale. A wise, melancholic, beautiful and deeply personal book. *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden) A masterful childhood memoir [Rosenberg] writes with the power of a novelist, although this story is real. *Aftonbladet* (Sweden) A masterpiece. *Politiken* (Denmark) About the Author Gran Rosenberg was born in 1948 in Sweden, where he is a well-known author. In 1970 he left academia to work as a journalist for Swedish television, radio, and print. He is the author of several books, including the highly acclaimed *Det Frlorade Landet* [The Lost Land: A Personal History of Zionism, Messianism, and the State of Israel]. Sarah Death is a translator, literary scholar, and editor of the UK-based journal *Swedish Book*. Her translations from the Swedish include *Ellen Mattsons Snow*, for which she won the Bernard Shaw

Translation Prize. She lives and works in Kent, England. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. We move to the house I actually remember a year or two later. The documents say one thing and the aging memory another, but it doesn't matter; this is where it all begins, in the building below the railroad station where the young man who would be my father alighted from the train on an early August evening in 1947, and which you can see right beneath the window on the left-hand side of the coach if you arrive by train from the north, across the Bridge. This is it; this is the Place. This is where my world assumes its first colors, lights, smells, sounds, voices, gestures, names, and words. I'm not sure how far back a human being can remember; some people say they have memories going back to their second year, but my first memories are of snow and cold and therefore probably date from somewhat later, since I was born in October. But one thing I'm certain of is that even before the point where my memories of that first world of mine begin, it had already set its stamp on so much that even things I can no longer remember aren't forgotten either. This is the Place that will continue to form me even when I'm convinced that I've formed myself.