

I Escaped From Auschwitz by Rudolf Vrba. Preface by Sir Martin Gilbert.
Robson Books 2006.

I Escaped From Auschwitz is Rudi Vrba's extraordinary story of his close to two years in that most infamous of Nazi death camps before his escape with a fellow inmate, Alfred Wetzler. The memoir was originally published in 2002 and then republished in 2006, the year of Vrba's death.

I Escaped from Auschwitz is, and is likely to remain, one of the most shocking, and moving of camp memoirs, not just for the detail of what happened to its author – paralleling the experiences of many others – not just for its documentation of the unthinking sadism and brutality of the camp authorities – well known from other texts – but for the fact that Vrba didn't just escape, he set out to disseminate to the world what was really happening in Auschwitz-Birkenau and found the world extremely reluctant to listen.

After the war, Vrba lived in Prague, Israel, and London where he wrote a series of articles about his wartime experiences, articles that were controversial and believed by some to be nothing more than anti-German propaganda. In 1976 he moved to Canada.

Vrba (born Walter Rosenberg) lived, like many of his European contemporaries, many lives: from free citizen to camp inmate, to escapee and heroic partisan to eminent bio-chemist. This memoir is about only one part of his life, lasting less than two years, but it was a period that informed the rest of it, and which he handled with enormous courage, integrity and honour.

In addition to the memoir there are eight appendices, including the text of the Vrba/Wetzler report, an assessment of its significance, and Vrba's account of the preparations for the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. I Escaped from Auschwitz occupies a major place in the canon of Shoah literature and will long continue so to do.

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