

Name_____

All But My Life

A true story by Gerda Weissman Klien

ANSWER IN COMPLETE SENTENCES! DO NOT SKIM FOR ANSWERS!

BIELITZ (BIELSKO)

1. What historic event occurred on September 3, 1939?

What was its immediate effect on the Weissmanns' lives?

What was the Third Reich?

2. On the day of the Nazi invasion, Gerda's parents ask her to telephone the other family members, but when she does so there is no reply. Why not?

Where have these people gone?

3. Why do Mr. and Mrs. Weissmann feel "relief and pride" when their children insist on staying with them?

4. Why don't Gerda's parents react when the carpet begins to burn?

5. Why does Gerda's brother, Arthur, slap her?

6. Why does the "drunken, jubilant mob" in Bielitz believe it has been liberated?

7. How long did it take the Germans to conquer Poland?

8. What did Gerda's father do for a living?

9. Why didn't he go to his factory to see what happened to it?

10. Why did Gerda's city Bielitz, which was a textile center, have a higher standard of living than almost anywhere else in Poland does?

11. Describe Gerda's home and yard.

12. Soon after the Germans conquered the Poles, Jews received orders to turn what items into the Nazis?
13. Why did Papa and her brother Arthur hide in a closet whenever a car stopped in front of their home or a soldier came to their door?
14. When one of Arthur's classmates tells him that young Jewish boys are being murdered in the camps, Arthur says, "Nonsense". Why doesn't he believe this?
15. The night before Arthur leaves home, he sits at his desk "looking through the mementos of his youth. What thoughts do you think are going through Arthur's head?
16. Why does Zeloski, the baker's deliveryman, use the past tense when he speaks of Arthur?

Why does Gerda say, "I hate you"?
17. Why doesn't Arthur want his family to accompany him to the station?

Why doesn't he turn around as he leaves the house?
18. Why does Mrs. Weissmann decide to visit the cemetery after Arthur leaves home?
19. What does the young man tell the concert audience at the resort of Krynica?

Why is he carried away by the police?

Do you think he really is a maniac?
20. In late November 1939 when all Jews were ordered to leave their homes and report to an armory with only 20 pounds of clothes, describe what was to be left on a table in the front hall of each house.
21. What was the punishment for violators of this order?

22. Specifically describe the selling of six Weismann family possessions:

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

23. What does Gerda's father have in mind when he says, "Whatever you are thinking now is wrong"?

What promise does Gerda make to him at this moment?

24. What good news did Gerda's family receive the next morning?

25. Right before Christmas a German policeman gave the family what order regarding Trude, the lady who did the family's laundry?

26. Describe their new home in the basement apartment.

27. What does Gerda mean when she says the Niania is an "old Austrian"?

Who was the Emperor Franz Josef?

28. Why doesn't Gerda tell her parents about her conversation with Arthur's friend Peter, even after they discover that Arthur is still alive?

29. Before the war what was the Jewish population of Bielitz?

30. By the spring of 1940, how many Jews were left?

31. How did Mama and Gerda get enough money to buy food?
32. Where did they get the yarn?
33. How many sweaters did they have to knit in order to buy a loaf of bread?
34. How old was Gerda on her birthday May 8, 1940?
35. A few days after Gerda's birthday when she had spent time in her garden, what new sign was put up?
36. What does it mean to the Polish Jews that the Germans have violated their pact with the Russians?

What will it mean to Arthur?

37. Why is Gerda not able to summon a doctor the night her father has a heart attack?
38. What does Ulla represent to the young Gerda?

Why does Gerda decide to learn English, despite the danger of doing so?

39. What is Gerda's initial reaction to Abek? Does she feel positive, negative, or uncertain?
40. How does the terrible letter from Erika affect Gerda's life and character?

What changes have the dreadful events wrought on Erika's own character?

"I want to kill, just kill," she writes. Would you say that acts of hatred engender more hate?

41. How does Gerda deduce (figure out) Arthur's changing state of mind from his letters?
42. In April 1942, the Jews in Bielitz are ordered to move to the quarter near the railway terminal, which would become their "ghetto." What does the word ghetto mean? (see glossary list of terms).
43. Why was this move hardest on mama?

44. Describe Gerda's thoughts as she walked in her forbidden garden:
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
45. Why does Gerda "despise" Niania when she goes to say goodbye?
46. Why do Gerda's parents refuse to look back at their old home when they leave for the ghetto?
- Why does Gerda choose to look back?
47. What food did they take with them?
48. Why are Gerda's parents in better spirits when they arrive in their ghetto apartment?
49. On May 8, 1942, what was Gerda's 18th birthday gift from her parents?
50. What did they have to sell to buy her gift?
51. Where was Papa going?
52. Where were Gerda and Mama to be moved?
53. Describe five things Mama and Papa talked about on their last night together.
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

54. What does Gerda say was her parents' only legacy (inheritance) to her and what did it do for her?
55. What did Papa insist that Gerda wear when she left the ghetto?
56. Why does this order turn out to be of such great importance?
57. What was Gerda's last memory of her father as he left on the train?
58. What reason does Gerda give for the Jews following orders and not fighting back and running away?
59. Tell five things about Merin.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
60. Why does he say to Gerda, "Are you crazy?"
61. Why does he throw her back on the truck and say, "You are too young to die"?
Is it because he pities her and wants to save her life, or because, as a worker, she will be useful to the Nazi state?
62. Why does Gerda walk away from her mother without looking back?

SOSNOWITZ

1. "Now I have to live," Gerda reflects on the train. What reasons does she give for wanting to live?
2. What is the Militz?

How does it differ from the ordinary police force?

Why does the Militz Commander feel so hostile toward his own race?

Why does he agree to give Gerda her permit?

3. Why is Abek's family so generous and hospitable to Gerda?

What is Gerda's reaction to their kindness?

4. What is a Dulag?

5. Who are the "living skeletons" Gerda meets in the Dulag?

Where are they to be sent?

6. Why does Gerda refuse the working card and decide to move on to the camp?

What does her decision have to do with Abek?

Why doesn't she want any "special privileges"?

7. During the train ride to the camp, why does Suse Kunz say that she feels "pretty good, in spite of everything"?

Does this statement reflect Gerda's mood?

BOLKENHAIN

1. Who is Frau Kugler?

2. Bolkenhain is Gerda's first view of the "homeland of Nazism". How do the Germans there seem different from those she observed in Poland?

What is "propoganda," and what effect has it had on the German people's preconceptions about Jews?

3. Who is Mrs. Berger?

What does she imply in her short speech to the young women?

Do you believe that her methods for dealing with the prisoners were good ones?

Do you find her a sympathetic character?

4. Why does the moon become Gerda's "loyal friend"?

What does the moon signify to her?

5. Why do the inmates of Bolkenhain have to wear three stars?

Why is it necessary that they be identified as Jews from every angle?

6. Who is Meister Zimmer?

7. How do his attitude and behavior differ from those of Frau Kugler?

8. How does Mrs. Berger get Gerda to acknowledge her father's death?

Do you think Mrs. Berger's method is kind?

What method does Gerda use to cope with the dreadful knowledge?

9. Under what government did Gerda's grandfather live?

Why was he exiled to Siberia?

Why was he not given a trial?

Why was he released and allowed to go home?

10. What is Yom Kippur?

Why do the prisoners decide to fast, and what satisfaction do they derive from this fasting?

11. Why is Lotte weeping at the camp fence?

Why is she, unlike Gerda, unable to draw on happy memories to help her survive?

12. What makes Gerda sense that she will never see Arthur again after receiving his frayed, dirty letter?

13. How did Frau Kugler save Gerda's life?

Do you believe that genuine affection existed between Frau Kugler and the girls under her care?

14. How did Abek's mother and sisters die?

What mixed emotions does their fate inspire in Gerda?

Why is she ashamed of her own feelings?

15. What message does Gerda communicate in the play she writes and performs for her fellow prisoners?

In what way does the play manage to convey hope?

What does Gerda get out of the experience of putting on the play, and why does she count it as the "greatest thing I have done in my life"?

16. In the summer of 1943, a change comes over Bolkenhain: incoming mail is cut off, Meister Zimmer becomes abusive, and there is not enough raw material for spinning. What is the meaning of this multifaceted change?

What turn is the war taking for the Germans?

MARZDORF

1. How do the Marzdorf *Judenalteste* and *Lagerfuhrerin* differ from their counterparts at Bolkenhain?

What does this mean for the inmates?

2. Who is Frau Aufsicht?
3. Why is the supervisor's question to Gerda, "Are you hungry?" a "tricky" one?
4. What keeps Gerda from throwing herself under a train and ending her life?

LANDESHUT

1. Upon seeing Litzi, Frau Kugler, and Mrs. Berger again, Gerda's reaction is "This was home!" What has she learned from her experience at Marzdorf?

2. What does Gerda state to be the most important quality in a future husband?

Why do the other girls laugh at her opinion?

Do you agree with her or with them?

3. Why did Abek volunteer to come to Burgberg?

Gerda feels responsible for his coming. Do you think that she is responsible?

If so, does she make up for it by her loving behavior to Abek during his last days?

4. Why do Italian prisoners suddenly appear in Burgberg?

What has happened in the war to turn the Italians and the Germans into enemies?

5. Why did Gerda decline to see Abek in Burgberg, writing him a note instead?

GRUNBERG

1. Who is the *Betriebsleiter*?

This man is what one would describe as a sadist. What is a sadist (use a dictionary), and which of the *Betriebsleiter*'s characteristics are sadistic?

2. What is the *Spinnerei*? Why is it so dangerous to work there?

3. What is tuberculosis?

What happens to the girls who contract it in Grunberg?

4. What impact does the beating by the SS guard have on Gerda?

How does it affect her will to survive?

How does it affect the other girls?

5. Why are the girls undressed and given numbers?

6. Why does Gerda want to procure poison?

THE MARCH

1. What turn in the war has prompted this march to Czechoslovakia?

2. How many girls began the march?

3. Out of Gerda's column of 2,000 how many survived the march?

4. What date did they begin the march?

What did the Hungarian girls who had been already marching a week steal?

Why didn't they transport the girls to the death camp by railroad?

5. Why was Gerda pulled out of line with three more girls?

6. That night where were the girls supposed to sleep?

7. Why wouldn't Gerda let the girls fall asleep?

8. What was Gerda's escape plan?
9. Why didn't they follow the plan?
10. What happened to the other girls who attempted to escape?
11. Why did Gerda say the girls kept marching and let themselves be slaughtered instead of fighting back?
12. What did Gerda tell the girls to make them happy?
13. What does Tusia mean when she says that Gerda has given her "belief in humanity"?

What is Gerda's response?

Is her decision to make up "good news" for the other girls a good one? Explain.

14. Why do the guards abandon the marchers?
15. What is the significance of the white flag hanging from the church steeple in Volary?

VOLARY

1. What is Gerda's first impression of Lt. Kurt Klein?
2. What does he represent to her?
3. Why does she feel compelled to tell him they are Jews?
4. What is his response?
5. When does Gerda finally admit to herself that her parents are dead?
6. Why has she delayed the acknowledgement until this moment?
7. What was significant about May 8th?
8. How much did Gerda weigh?
9. What does Kurt mean when he says, "It seems we fought a war against the Nazis, but I haven't met a Nazi yet"?
10. Why does Gerda compare herself to Hans Christian Andersen's mermaid?

EPILOGUE

1. Gerda writes, "Survival is both an exalted privilege and a painful burden". What does she mean by this?

In what way was it a burden?

2. What does the State of Israel symbolize to Gerda?

3. Gerda writes, "Throughout my years in the camps, and against nearly insuperable odds, I knew of no one who committed suicide". Why do you think these people, who suffered such great loss and pain, did not resort to suicide, when many people take their lives for seemingly lesser reasons?

4. What is the significance of Gerda's guilt over having purloined, long ago, a rum ball?

How does this guilt figure into her current life?

5. Why was she unable to speak German on the radio?

Why does Gerda prefer speaking English to any other language?