



# I Will Plant You a Lilac Tree: A Memoir of a Schindler's List Survivor

By Laura Hillman

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## **"HANNELORE, YOUR PAPA IS DEAD."**

In the spring of 1942 Hannelore received a letter from Mama at her school in Berlin, Germany--Papa had been arrested and taken to a concentration camp. Six weeks later he was sent home; ashes in an urn.

Soon another letter arrived. "The Gestapo has notified your brothers and me that we are to be deported to the East--whatever that means." Hannelore knew: labor camps, starvation, beatings...How could Mama and her two younger brothers bear that? She made a decision: She would go home and be deported with her family. Despite the horrors she faced in eight labor and concentration camps, Hannelore met and fell in love with a Polish POW named Dick Hillman.

Oskar Schindler was their one hope to survive. Schindler had a plan to take eleven hundred Jews to the safety of his new factory in Czechoslovakia.

Incredibly both she and Dick were added to his list. But survival was not that simple. Weeks later Hannelore found herself, alone, outside the gates of Auschwitz, pushed toward the smoking crematoria.

*I Will Plant You a Lilac Tree* is the remarkable true story of one young woman's nightmarish coming-of-age. But it is also a story about the surprising possibilities for hope and love in one of history's most brutal times.

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### Editorial Review

#### From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up—In a clear, objective narrative, Hillman (called by her German name, Hannelore, in the book) describes her life from April 1942, as a student at a private school in Berlin, until the German surrender in April 1945 that freed her from a detention camp. After her father's death, she left school and was deported with her mother and brothers to Poland. During her three years of captivity she was moved to several labor and concentration camps. Her inclusion on Oskar Schindler's list led, finally, to her deportation to the Brünnlitz camp in Czechoslovakia, where Jewish prisoners were treated humanely. At the fourth detention camp—Budzyn—Hannelore met the man who would become her husband. Her growing love and concern for him; her strong instinct for survival; and her endurance in the face of deprivation, inhumane conditions, and near-starvation provide considerable inspiration. Several photos of family members are included, along with a map that clearly indicates the locations of the camps in which Hannelore was held prisoner. While strong language, descriptions of brutality, a rape scene, and sexual innuendos suggest an audience of mature teens, this readable account of loss and survival during Hitler's Holocaust belongs in most collections.—*Susan Scheps, Shaker Heights Public Library, OH*

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#### From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Gr. 8-11. There are many YA Holocaust memoirs, but few of them deal with a teenager's survival in the concentration camps. That makes Hillman's affecting account particularly noteworthy. In 1942 Berlin, Hannelore, 16, bravely volunteers to be deported with her mother and two younger brothers to Poland. Of course, they are soon separated, and during the next three years Hannelore is moved through eight concentration camps. In clipped, first-person narrative, she remembers the worst: crammed cattle cars; backbreaking work from stone quarries to salt mines; beatings; hunger; her own rape; the smell of children's bodies in the crematoria. She tells it as she endured it, quietly relaying the facts without sensationalism or sentimentality. She remembers making friends, one of whom is beaten to death because of a relationship with a German soldier. Hannelore herself falls in love with a young prisoner, Dick. At the end of the book is a photo of the lovers reunited and married; no one else in the family photos survived. The author never fully explains how she and Dick get onto Schindler's list, which saves them from Auschwitz (an explanatory note about the list would have been helpful), but the arbitrariness of the list was as true to the Holocaust survival experience as the loss. *Hazel Rochman*

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#### Review

A man by the name of Oskar Schindler is taking eleven hundred Jews out of here. If only we could go with them." Thus appears one glimmer of hope in Hannelore Wolff's harrowing odyssey through eight labor and concentration camps, facing a rape, the death of a brother, lice, scarlet fever and near starvation. Yet, her story becomes one of courage and love and luck in the harshest of times. She falls in love with fellow prisoner Dick Hillman, who's involved with the Czech partisans in the countryside, and they help each other keep hope alive. They indeed make Schindler's list and survive until liberation, soon thereafter marrying and making their way to New York City. Hillman, born Hannelore Wolff, has written a memoir of astonishing power, told in plain, clear prose, even more powerful for its matter-of-fact tone. The facts speak for themselves in this work that ought to make its way into many high school Holocaust programs. (map) (Nonfiction. 13+) (Kirkus Reviews)

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