

Ursula's Prism

by

Anna Block

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Ursula's Prism

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This is a work of fiction based on a true story and all
people – living or dead – events, dates and situations
are made to the best recollection of the author.

The publisher assumes no responsibility for the accuracy..

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On a more personal note, I wish to thank Sue Tanon, my confidante, the one who spurred me on from the inception of my work. And thank you to Kathy Witmer for being a spiritual guidance and true friend. Thank you both for your immeasurable encouragement and support.

Not enough gratitude can be expressed to my mother. As a child I watched her laugh and dance, never realizing the underlying agony. It was her willingness to share these deeply traumatic moments of her childhood that allowed me to have an even deeper respect for my family and my faith. Her hopes align with mine-that in the telling of these events, maybe we can prevent these atrocities from repeating. Thank you, Mother; I am humbled yet proud to be Ursula's daughter.

God bless.

Introduction

Stories of children suffering during the Holocaust are difficult to read, yet they often inspire the human spirit to take action. Survivors' stories teach us that if society fails, we are all responsible: We must become helpers and resisters so history does not repeat itself. *Ursula's Prism*, based on a true story imaginatively retold by Ursula's daughter, Anna Block, is one such story.

It begins with the bustling Swartz family and their nanny at breakfast in Glashütte, just outside Dresden, Germany. Among the happy tumult of five children preparing for their day, Ursula's mother tells her about the life-long lessons of her special necklace with its crystal prisms: show kindness; think positive thoughts; be strong; and keep an open mind. Soon after, as armed SS soldiers arrest the family, Ursula manages to slip her mother's necklace into her pocket.

Unexpected helpers and their desire to act against the brutal Nazis appear in the story like the beautiful reflections of the seemingly magical prism. Ursula, her 12 year-old brother Ludwig, along with four other children, manage to escape from Bergen-Belsen and brave the unknown, the bitter winter countryside and starvation. Yet the power of the children's imagination and their will to live shines on every page.

Like Anne Frank's diary, the lessons in *Ursula's Prism* are many. The children learn that they cannot rely on stereotypes of soldiers and farmers to keep them safe, but must judge each person individually. They find ways to nurture themselves and keep hopeful that circumstances will improve. Ultimately, it is their loyalty to each other, their ability to ask questions, think critically and use their emotional intelligence that enables them to stay alive in the woods day after day.

With this in mind, perhaps the secrets of the necklace that Ursula shares with the other children gives them the resiliency they need to survive. It is my hope that readers of this book will find that they too possess what it takes to resist hate in today's world, and that they will pass this story along.

Maureen McNeil
Director of Education
The Anne Frank Center USA

A Note from Ursula's Daughter

For the honor of the Jewish people and nation I offer this tribute: A labor of love dedicated to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. I submit this reverential work because even after all these years, for the survivors the torment is never over; dreams are haunted by recollections, an innocent gesture or phrase can rekindle a tormenting memory.

Within the pages of this book are my mother's memories and one must take into account her age at the time of her and her family's capture. Her childish perception of the tumult that surrounded her may have distorted some factual details, but, can one ever truly comprehend the depths of hatred and fear that plague those who suffered demoralizing atrocities at the hands of another?

Yet, amidst the dreadful, horrifying acts that exemplified the Hitler regime, an opposing power stirred. This power is the emotion that overcomes us when we witness cruelty, the emotion that forces our hearts to cry out for cessation of that inhuman transgression. This power is compassion, a force that moved many – despite great, personal danger – to help the Jews and other victims of Nazi terror to survive.

Compassion dwells within each of us, a gift from our Creator. When we use this power, we lift ourselves to a

higher standard – and those we touch. Though socioeconomic conditions or mindsets of ignorance may seek to destroy our compassion for the less fortunate or for those who are different from us, we must still be able to recognize our God-given humanity and overcome this negativity. How? We can start by teaching our children the “crystal prism principles.”

The “crystal prism principles,” as introduced in *Ursula’s Prism*, teach us respect for ourselves and others. Sharing, displaying kindness, having an open mind, having a positive attitude and keeping our word are just the basic moral elements that every human being needs instilled within them. These “principles” are not new but rather buried in our wounded souls, craving to be set free. If all would practice “the principles,” a better life would be possible.

This generation and the ones to follow cannot afford to lose their compassion. We must teach it to our children and demonstrate its positive and beneficial qualities. It starts with one – one open heart, one open mind – and then, in a domino effect, all manner of negativity can be squelched.

Can we begin today?

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Scale: .5"=@100 miles

X - where the mechanic dropped the children off

Y - where the five children were found by the British

Z - displaced persons camp in Essen

••••• the children's journey on foot

||||| train to Bergen-Belsen