



If This Is A Woman: Inside Ravensbrück: Hitler's Concentration Camp for Women

By Sarah Helm

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On a sunny morning in May 1939 a phalanx of 800 women - housewives, doctors, opera singers, politicians, prostitutes - were marched through the woods fifty miles north of Berlin, driven on past a shining lake, then herded through giant gates. Whipping and kicking them were scores of German women guards. Their destination was Ravensbrück, a concentration camp designed specifically for women by Heinrich Himmler, prime architect of the Nazi genocide. For decades the story of Ravensbrück was hidden behind the Iron Curtain and today is still little known. Using testimony unearthed since the end of the Cold War, and interviews with survivors who have never spoken before, Helm has ventured into the heart of the camp, demonstrating for the reader in riveting detail how easily and quickly the unthinkable horror evolved.

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Editorial Review

Review

Compelling ... [Helm] has painstakingly sought out many survivors and talked to them herself. The results are devastating ... What one is left with at the end of this momentous book is a sense of the power of human nature, both for good and evil Independent on Sunday A profoundly moving chronicle Observer An epic feat of scholarly investigation Spectator Where Helm's history excels is in her refusal to reduce any of the people in her history to stereotypes. Complexity is respected. She pays attention to the specificities of people's lives, including their religious beliefs, political aspirations and dreams. Even when discussing brutal female guards, Helm avoids demonisation -- Joanna Bourke Telegraph Helm has done us all a great service in this compelling, magisterial volume ... Read this book. Be appalled. Be moved. And be angry that so little action was taken to help, or to remember, until it was nearly too late. Read it, and weep Jewish Chronicle A sense of urgency infuses this history, which comes just in time to gather the testimony of the camp's survivors ... meticulous, unblinking ... [Helm's] book comes not a moment too soon The Economist Splendidly researched and tremendously moving ... Helm's book, based in part on interviews with survivors, is a model of sensitivity and seriousness Sunday Times 'Helm is a tireless researcher: she has recovered the testimony of scores of women... She makes unimaginable suffering seem almost graspable through hundreds of intimate stories. She rightly says that her book is the first exhaustive 'biography of Ravensbruck beginning at the beginning and ending at the end'.' -- Thomas Laqueur Guardian

About the Author

Sarah Helm was a reporter on the Sunday Times and Diplomatic Editor for the Independent before becoming Jerusalem and then Brussels correspondent for the same paper. A Life in Secrets was her first book.

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Paul Steinbach:

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