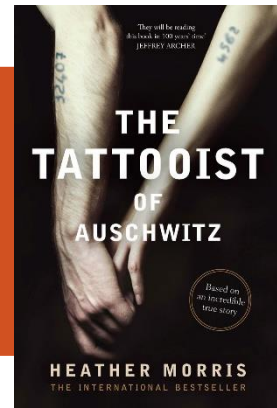




# The Tattooist of Auschwitz

## Heather Morris



### Author Background

Heather Morris was born in 1953 in Te Awamutu, a small town in the middle of the New Zealand's North Island. She spent her childhood in the even smaller village of Pirongia. In 1971 Heather moved to Melbourne, Australia, where she met her husband-to-be Steve Morris and the two were married in 1973. In 1975 Steve and Heather returned to New Zealand, living in Christchurch, on the South Island. She commenced a Bachelor of Arts degree at Canterbury University in 1986, before moving back to Melbourne in 1987. Heather enrolled at Monash University and completed a BA in 1991, majoring in Political Science and Sociology. In 1995 she began work in the Social Work department at Melbourne's Monash Medical Centre, where Heather stayed until 2017.

In 1996 Heather enrolled in the Australian College of Journalism's Professional Scriptwriting course. She met Lale Sokolov on 3 December 2003. At the time of Lale's death on 31 October 2006 Heather had optioned his story to a Melbourne production company. In 2017, she adapted the screenplay into a novel, which was published by Echo Publishing and Bonnier Books in 2018 as *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. In 2019 Heather released her second Holocaust novel, *Cilka's Journey*, before publishing a non-fiction book, *Stories of Hope*, in 2020. This was followed in 2021 by her third Holocaust novel, *Three Sisters*, and in 2023 Heather's latest novel, *Sisters under the Rising Sun*, set in the Japanese POW camps in Indonesia during World War II.

In May 2024 a TV miniseries of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*.

### Book Summary

Lale Sokolov is well-dressed, a charmer, a ladies' man. He is also a Jew. In April 1942 Lale is forced on the first transport from Slovakia to the concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Lale immediately stands out to his fellow prisoners and when his captors discover that he speaks several languages, he is put to work in the privileged position of Tätowierer – the tattooist – to mark his fellow prisoners, forever.

Imprisoned for more than two and a half years, Lale witnesses horrific atrocities and barbarism, but also incredible acts of bravery and compassion. Risking his own life, he uses his privileged position to exchange jewels and money from murdered Jews for food to keep his fellow prisoners alive. One day in July 1942, Lale comforts a trembling young woman waiting in line to have the number 34902 tattooed onto her arm. Her name is Gita, and Lale vows to somehow survive the camp and marry her. His life given new purpose, Lale does his best through the struggle and suffering to use his position for good.

A vivid, harrowing, and ultimately hopeful re-creation of Lale Sokolov's experiences as the man who tattooed the arms of thousands of prisoners with what would become one of the most potent symbols of the Holocaust, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* is also a testament to the endurance of love and humanity under the darkest possible conditions.

## Discussion Questions

- ❖ How did you feel about Lale when he was first introduced, as he arrived in Auschwitz? How did your understanding of him change throughout the novel?
- ❖ What qualities did Lale have that influenced the way he was treated in the camp? Where did those qualities come from?
- ❖ There were many questionable jobs given to inmates, such as “Nazi Girlfriend,” “Beat Them Up Until They Speak Bully,” “Tattooist” – to survive, these jobs had to be completed. Which one shocked you the most? What other thoughts do you have about these jobs and the fulfillment of them?
- ❖ Lale had many people that “saved” him along the way, from a friend mending him during his illness, to outsiders giving him additional food, to Gita’s friend having her “Nazi companion” remove him from his current place of work – who do you think was the most influential person in his survival and why?
- ❖ Discuss some of the small acts of humanity carried out by individuals in *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. How did these small acts of kindness have greater implications? Did it make you reconsider what you believe to be brave or heroic? Did this make you think differently about the impact of your own everyday actions?
- ❖ *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* makes clear that there were also non-Jewish prisoners in the camp. How did the treatment of Jews differ from that of non-Jews? How did differences manifest themselves?
- ❖ Lale faced danger even after the camp was liberated. How did his experiences immediately after liberation prepare him for the rest of his life?

## References

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