



# *Tattooist of Auschwitz*

*By Heather Morris*

*First published in 2018*

## **Genre and Subject**

*Biographical fiction*

*Tattooist fiction*

*Auschwitz (concentration camp)*

## **Synopsis**

I tattooed a number on her arm. She tattooed her name on my heart. In 1942, Lale Sokolov arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau. He was given the job of tattooing the prisoners marked for survival - scratching numbers into his fellow victims' arms in indelible ink to create what would become one of the most potent symbols of the Holocaust. Waiting in line to be tattooed, terrified and shaking, was a young girl. For Lale - a dandy, a jack-the-lad, a bit of a chancer - it was love at first sight. And he was determined not only to survive himself, but to ensure this woman, Gita, did, too. So begins one of the most life-affirming, courageous, unforgettable and human stories of the Holocaust: the love story of the tattooist of Auschwitz.

## **Author Biography**

Heather was born in Te Awamutu, New Zealand, educated at Pirongia Primary School and Te Awamutu College. In 1971 she moved to Melbourne, Australia. In 1975 she and her husband returned to New Zealand, living in Christchurch.

She commenced a B.A. degree at Canterbury University (NZ) in 1986 before moving back to Melbourne in 1987. She completed her B.A. at Monash University in 1991. In 1995 she began work in the Social Work Department at Monash Medical Centre in Melbourne where she stayed until 2017.

In 1996 she decided to follow her passion for storytelling and enrolled in The Professional Scriptwriting Course through the Australian College of Journalism. Heather attended many screenwriting courses, seminars and workshops in both Australia and the U.S. Her first screenplay was optioned by Academy Award winning writer Pamela Wallace (Witness).

In 2003 she was introduced to Lale Sokolov and subsequently wrote *The Tattooist* as a screenplay.

*The Tattooist* was optioned by Instinct Entertainment (Melbourne). When the option lapsed, Heather entered it into several international screenwriting competitions, winning the International Independent Film Awards competition in 2016 and highly placing in several others, including the ISA (International Screenwriters' Association) and Final Draft competitions.

## Discussion Starters

- 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?
- Survival in the camp depended on people doing deeds of questionable morality. Lale became the tattooist, but how did Gita's choices affect her survival? What about her friend who befriended a Nazi?
- Inmates in the concentration camp had to make life-or-death decisions every day. Why did some make the "right" decisions and survive while others did not?
- 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?
- Had Gita and Lale met in a more conventional way, would they have developed the same kind of relationship? How did their circumstances change the course of their romance?
- In what ways were the relationships between Gita and her friends different from the usual friendships between teenage girls? In what ways were they similar?
- In what ways was Lale a hero? In what ways was he an ordinary man?
- Lale faced danger even after the camp was liberated. How did his experiences immediately after liberation prepare him for the rest of his life?
- How does *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* change your perceptions about the Holocaust in particular, and war in general? What implications does *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* this book hold for our own time?

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