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Holocaust survivor brings her message of faith to B.C.

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On a death march through central Europe in 1945, some girls stopped walking and sat on the snow.

Nazi captors promptly shot the girls. Gerda Weissmann Klein, a frail 20-year old Jewish girl on the march, called to God and looked upward as she continued to walk.

"The sky was beautiful, the snow was clean, the snowy pines were beautiful in the sunlight," Klein wrote in her first memoir, "All But My Life."

She had not lost her sense of hope or belief, the 82-year-old told the Enquirer this week.

"You have to believe when bad things happen as well, you know," she said. "It's all part of life."

Klein, a Holocaust survivor, plans to bring that message to Battle Creek on Monday. She has scheduled multiple stops, the first of which addressing an expected 1,900 school children from across the state at W.K. Kellogg Auditorium, 50 W. Van Buren St.

After a luncheon with a smaller group of students, her day is to be capped with a 7 p.m. free public event at W.K. Kellogg Auditorium. No tickets are necessary, organizer Margaret Lincoln said, and all are welcome.

"Gerda's message is not simply about understanding the historical complexities of World War II," Lincoln said. "She speaks a message of survival. She speaks a message of living and connects what happened to her with how not just students but certainly adults can make a difference."

Klein has written four books, all referencing the Holocaust, and traveled the world, addressing everyone from the United Nations to students at Columbine High School in Colorado after the infamous shootings there. She's spoken out against hunger, violence and religious persecution. A documentary based on her Holocaust experiences, "One Survivor Remembers," won an Academy Award.

She keeps things in perspective.

"I don't want to live in a world where a potato is more valuable than an Oscar," she has said. "And I don't want children to be in a world where an Oscar is so important that you forget that there are people who do not have a potato."

Klein suffered in Jewish ghettos, lost her parents and brother to the Nazis, worked in labor camps, and almost starved on the death march. It was an experience that left her at 21 gray-haired and 68 pounds. She escaped death moments before liberation, when Nazis left her and others in a building with a bomb that, for unknown reasons, never exploded.

She resettled in Buffalo, N.Y., with her husband, American soldier Kurt Klein, who helped liberate her. In Buffalo, she raised her three children. Now, she calls her family, including her eight grandchildren, her "ultimate success."

"My experiences (during the war) are of course significant in my life, but since then I've lived my life and had wonderful experiences," she said.

Her darkest years, however, have served as the foundation for her speeches since the publication of "All But My Life," in 1957.

"In a way it's a burden and in a way it's a relief, you know," she said of being a Holocaust survivor. "I think survival is a great privilege, but by the same token, I think it carries with it an obligation to share it with others."

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