

Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948.

by Benjamin Wilkomirski, trans. by Carol Brown Janeway.

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Wilkomirski says his earliest memory is that of being yanked from a hiding place by Latvian militia and watching his father squashed to death by a truck the winter of 1939 in Riga. He was three or four years old. He describes hiding in a farmhouse, being separated from his brothers, and riding in a packed cattle car to Majdanek concentration camp near Lublin, Poland. Wilkomirski suffers from hunger and thirst; he is beaten and lives in filth. Lice, other insects, and rats gnaw at his frail body. There's a second torturous train ride to another camp, where he is hidden under a pile of rags by women; then a forced march in the bitter cold. Eventually, he is taken from an orphanage in Krakow to Switzerland, where he is adopted; but it is years before he can overcome his fears of the camps. These fragments of memories offer a picture of the unbelievable horror that was the Holocaust.

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