



# What Time and Sadness Spared: Mother and Son Confront the Holocaust

*Doron S. Ben-Atar*

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## **What Time and Sadness Spared: Mother and Son Confront the Holocaust** Doron S. Ben-Atar

Roma Ben-Atar resisted until late in life the urging of her family to share the memories of her Nazi-era experiences. The Holocaust exerted a dark pressure on all of their lives but was never openly discussed. It was only when her granddaughter insisted on hearing the whole truth, with a directness partly generational, that Mrs. Ben-Atar agreed to tell her story.

*What Time and Sadness Spared* is a journey of both loss and endurance, moving with shocking speed from a carefree adolescence in upper-middle-class Warsaw to the horrors of the Final Solution. The young girl sees her neighborhood transformed into a ghetto populated by skeletal figures both alive and dead. Unbelievably, things only grow worse as this ruin gives way to the death factories of Majdanek and Auschwitz and the death marches of 1945. Life in the camps changes her in less than a day, as if "the person in my body was a stranger I had never met." Her only consolation is to lie on her wooden bunk, no mattress, and speak to the soul of her mother, who, like virtually her entire family, had already been swept away. Roma must summon astonishing powers of adaptation simply to survive, bringing her finally through the wreckage of postwar Europe and to an entirely new life in Israel.

In this unique family collaboration Roma Ben-Atar's son Doron, a historian who brings with him fluency in psychoanalysis, contributes through his commentary an awareness of the difficulties presented by historical narrative and memory. A visitor to the much-changed sites in which his mother grew up and was interned by the Nazis, he also voices the perspective of the survivors' children and their ambivalence over being "protected" from this past. As the generation that endured the camps passes from this world, *What Time and Sadness Spared* illustrates with particular urgency the historical responsibilities of the survivors' descendants, who must become the new vessels for a story that will not remain alive on its own but demands our courage and curiosity.

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