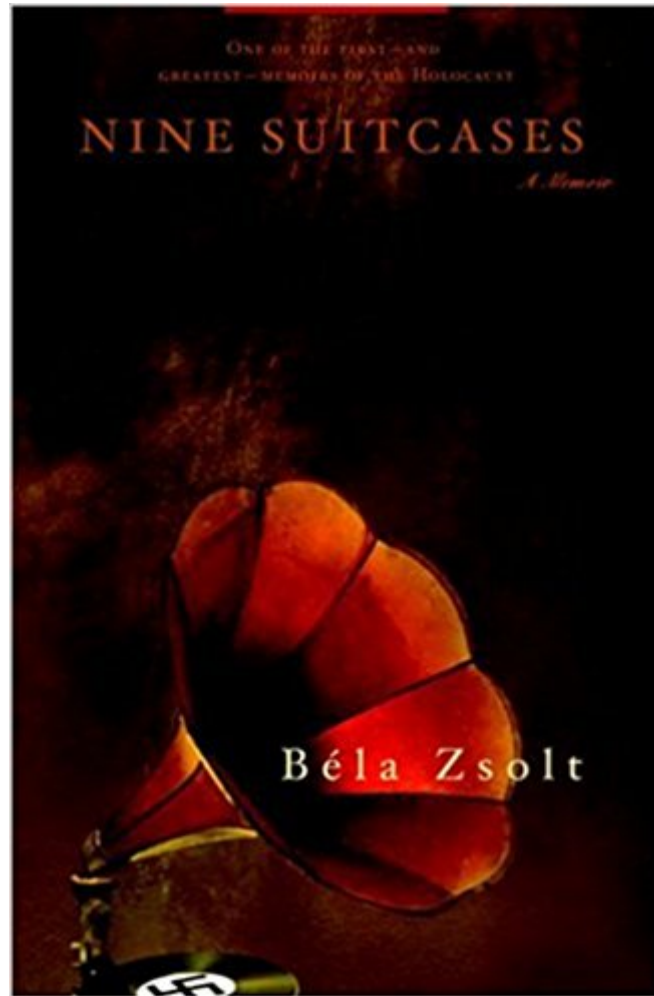




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# Nine Suitcases: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Suppressed by the Communists for nearly forty years and never before published in English, *Nine Suitcases* is one of the first and greatest memoirs of the Holocaust ever written. Originally published in Hungary in weekly installments starting in 1946, it tells the harrowing story of Béla Zsolt's experiences in the ghetto and as a forced laborer in the Ukraine. It gives not only a rare insight into Hungarian fascism, but also a shocking exposure to the cruelty, indifference, selfishness, cowardice and betrayal of which human beings—the victims no less than the perpetrators—are capable in extreme circumstances. Apart from being one of the earliest writers on the Holocaust, Zsolt is also one of the most powerful. He bears comparison with Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, or Imre Kertész. Both an accomplished novelist and a highly skilled journalist, he was reporting and analyzing these appalling events soon after they occurred with exceptional clarity and a devastating blend of angry despair and cool detachment. Zsolt was spared Auschwitz, but he witnessed and suffered some of the worst atrocities of the Holocaust elsewhere; his nightmarish but meticulously realistic chronicle of smaller and larger crimes against humanity is as riveting as it is horrifying. The rediscovery and publication of *Nine Suitcases* is an event of great historical importance.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 336 pages

Publisher: Schocken; 1st American Ed edition (November 9, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 080524204X

ISBN-13: 978-0805242041

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.2 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #842,012 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #58 in Books > Biographies &

Memoirs > Historical > Holocaust #2839 in Books > History > World > Jewish #4785

in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe

## Customer Reviews

Hungarian Jewish novelist and journalist Zsolt (who died in 1949) experienced more than his share of suffering, as documented in this Holocaust memoir published in English for the first time (it originally appeared in serial form in 1946 in a magazine Zsolt founded). Born in 1895, Zsolt was well

known in intellectual circles during the 1920s and '30s as a liberal political journalist. This book highlights his years in Ukraine as a forced laborer for the Hungarian army, the months he spent in a ghetto in Nagyvárad awaiting deportation to Auschwitz and his escape from the ghetto in the spring of 1944 (he eventually made it to Switzerland with his wife). As one of the first Holocaust memoirs, this piercing account displays a raw freshness that is as vivid as it is horrifying. It lacks the genre's usual displays of hope and strength, focusing instead on humanity's basest instincts, as expressed by the brutal Hungarian gendarmes and by their Jewish victims as well. Noting his inability to write of the horrors he experienced, Szolt reports, "I resisted my own experiences with elementary force, like a man who tries to overcome a malignant tumor that pokes conspicuously through his skin by not looking...." Clearly, Szolt's writing capacity returned with a vengeance after the war; his powerful, poignant honesty shows little mercy to his readers' sensibilities. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** The author, a Jew, was born in northern Hungary in 1895 and moved to Budapest in 1920. During the next two decades, Zsolt became one of Hungary's most prolific writers, producing 10 novels and four plays. A sophisticated bohemian, he spent much of his life in the fashionable coffee houses among writers, artists, and intellectuals, conducting political and cultural campaigns. In 1942 he was sent to the Ukraine, but his influential friends in Budapest succeeded in bringing him home in 1943, where he was thrown into a notorious political prison and detained there for four months. In 1944 Zsolt and his wife escaped from a Hungarian ghetto, went underground, and eventually found a safe haven in Switzerland. They returned to Hungary in 1945. His mother, brothers, and sisters; his wife's parents; and her 13-year-old daughter by her first husband were murdered in Auschwitz. *Nine Suitcases* was originally published in weekly installments in 1946 and 1947 in a Hungarian journal; in 1980, the compilation was published as a book. Concentrating mainly on his experiences as an inmate of the ghetto of Nagyvarad and as a forced laborer in the Ukraine, the author provides not only a rare and perceptive insight into Hungarian fascism but also a horrifying exposure of the depths of the cruelty, indifference, cowardice, and betrayal of which human beings are capable. These horrors, interspersed with moments of grotesque farce, paint a nightmarish picture of a world without hope during the Holocaust--an important book, to be sure. George Cohen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Written almost immediately following the end of WWII, there was no distance between M. Zsolt and his experiences. Originally published as articles in a magazine, the force of the writing really slams

into the reader from the beginning. M. Zsolt picks up his story in 1944 in the Nagyvarad ghetto. At that time, he had already been a slave ('forced labourer') for the Hungarian forces allied with the Nazis in the Ukraine, survived, freed, and then thrown into prison as a political prisoner. He is already in his late 40s, and a veteran of WWI. What struck me in this memoir is the similarity of M. Zsolt's thinking about the horrors he endures and the writings of M. Wiesel. Both authors come to the conclusion that there are no words to communicate the experience, yet both realize they must attempt to do so. I'm thankful that this memoir is now available in English (and the translator was actually with M. Zsolt in Bergen-Belsen as a boy).

Excellent memoir of Bela Zsolt who was the step father of Eva Heyman, a thirteen year old girl from Hungary, who left behind a diary of her last days before being sent to a concentration camp and her death there shortly after. This book covers that period of WWII and shortly after.

Bela Zsolt produced one of the finest Holocaust memoirs I have ever read. Like Primo Levi, he was a keen observer. He provides the reader with a magnificently detailed account of his thoughts and experiences as he is caught up in the horrors of the Nazi era. Moreover, he presents us with no stereotypes. You won't find unadulterated two-dimensional representations of good or evil in his narrative. These are fully developed human beings, complex, conflicted, and anguished. The result is a breathtaking view of the horrors mankind inflicts on itself in the worst of times.

I don't know if I'd call this one of the greatest Holocaust memoirs like it says on the cover blurb, but it is good, and it is significant because it's definitely one of the earliest memoirs. It was originally published in serial form in 1946, only a year after the war ended, but it was suppressed by the Communists and languished in obscurity after that. It wasn't translated into English until recently. The author, Bela Zsolt, was the stepfather of the famous 16 teen Holocaust diarist Eva Heyman, who was killed at Auschwitz. Bela was a famous journalist and novelist before the war, and he used his wealth and connections to escape the ghetto with his wife at the eleventh hour. Both of their entire families perished. Bela returned to Hungary after the war and was elected to Parliament. His wife, Eva Heyman's mother, committed suicide shortly after Eva's diary was published. Bela died in 1949, not long after his wife. He was only in his fifties. Maybe it was a broken heart. I quite enjoyed Zsolt's frank, sardonic writing style. It made me want to read his other works, but I don't think any have been translated into English, and I don't want to read them QUITE badly enough to learn Hungarian. This memoir was about Zsolt's time in the ghetto in 1944, and also

his experiences serving as a forced laborer in Ukraine earlier in the war. He has a way of capturing the personalities of minor characters in just a few lines. The book did end very abruptly though. In fact, there was really no ending at all. Perhaps this was due to the serial format it was originally written in; maybe he was contracted for a certain number of issues and no more, so he couldn't wrap things up properly. One wonders how he would have improved upon things if he had lived to edit his serial before it was published in book form. I would recommend this book, particularly to those interested in the Holocaust in Hungary.

i will purchase it from you next time. my parents need it, good. Thin and sharp. Well excellence. Great product. Very well.

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