

'The Happiest Man on Earth: The Beautiful Life of an Auschwitz Survivor'

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

As I slid the book off the shelf, my daughter had an immediate reaction.

"Really, Mom? That's going to make you cry," she said with the wisdom of a 14-year-old who can't believe her mom tears up over books and movies.

I checked it out anyway.

The title seems to contradict itself: "The Happiest Man on Earth: The Beautiful Life of an Auschwitz Survivor."

I haven't read an exhaustive list of books about Auschwitz, but I've read quite a few — and I'd never equate the words "happy" and "beautiful" with that time in the world's history.

But as I read the words of this man, who is 101, I was awed by his story.

It is not a happy story. He endured horrors that I cannot imagine. No matter how many stories I read about the Holocaust, I can't believe something so awful, so evil, could possibly happen.

Every chapter begins with his words of wisdom:

"Hug your mother."

"One good friend is my whole world."

"There are always miracles in the world, even when it seems dark."

"Love is the best medicine."

Yet it did. And Eddie Jaku lived to tell his tale.

After I zipped through this book, I ordered my own copy from the local bookstore. It is a story I need to read again, and I want my children to read it as well.

It is sad, of course, but we should never lose the ability to ache over human suffering. I hope I always tear up when I read about how prisoners were divided into two lines — one destined to work for the concentration camp, and the other doomed to death in the gas chambers. So many times family members were separated and I can't imagine the heartbreak and horror of watching my loved ones walk to an uncertain — or certain — fate.

Even now, as I think about these atrocities, my stomach

aches and my vision grows blurry.

Jaku used the phrase "happiest man" in his title. As he tells his story, he shares his wisdom of how he survived emotionally — and it was not by becoming angry and bitter.

He will never forgive Hitler, he says — that wouldn't be fair to himself or the 6 million people who died in the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis.

But he is not angry. He saw firsthand what anger can make a person do — anger can lead to the hatred and violence that caused Germans to turn on their fellow countrymen, many Jewish citizens, to beat and kill and imprison.

Throughout the book Jaku uses words to combat the Nazi regime — words such as love,

kindness, hope. Every chapter begins with his words of wisdom:

"Hug your mother."

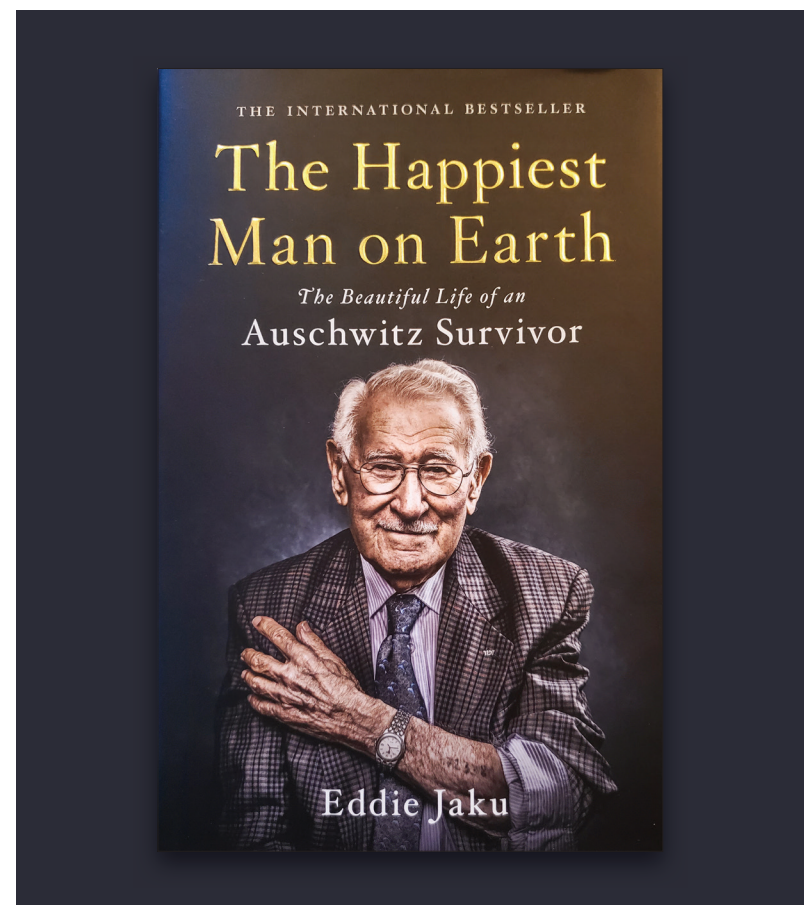
"One good friend is my whole world."

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the world, even when it seems dark."

"Love is the best medicine."

I am so glad Jaku shared his story with the world. It will stay with me forever.



Lisa Britton/Go! Magazine

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