

## Reading and Discussion Questions for *Still Alive*

Ruth Kluger is a retired UCI German Professor and as a child and young girl, she witnessed history. As an adult, she recalls and analyzes it. She published the story of her life in German in 1992. The book was a bestseller in Germany, Austria and in translation in other European countries. Kluger retained the English translation rights and the book you are reading is her translation and updating of the earlier autobiography. She waited until her mother's death to publish it.

1. Vienna or “Wien” in German: Where is it located? Can you say anything about its culture? What happened there in 1938?
2. Who are the individual members of Kluger’s family and what happens to them?
3. How does Kluger describe torture (18)? Does her definition differ from your own understanding?
4. Look at the description of the aunt who died in the gas chamber on pp. 18-19. Kluger is not trying to convey petulance or lack of concern, but she is trying to convey something important. How do you understand her failure to forgive her poor murdered aunt?
5. What is the significance of poetry/poems and ballads in this account? Watch for her use of poetry.
6. Kluger writes of her “shabby, shameful childhood in Vienna” (24-26). What were the restrictions on Jewish children?
7. What is the significance of Kluger's taking the name Ruth? (42)
8. How does the movie *Snow White* figure in this narrative? (45)
9. How does Kluger experience Nazi propaganda? (50-52)
10. How does Kluger react to the man who is surprised that an Auschwitz survivor in Israel could hold Arabs in such contempt? (65)
11. Kluger makes some provocative comments about the museum culture of the camps. Do you agree? (66)
12. What do you make of her comments on p. 71 and elsewhere that her readers are most likely female?
13. What is Theresienstadt? Name 2-3 things that happen to Kluger there. Why is she so annoyed by the colleague’s wife who says it was not so bad?

14. What is Zionism and what does it mean to Kluger in the camps?
15. What happened to Schorschi? (79-83)
16. The section on the discussion of claustrophobia is crucial to understanding the book. Why is this socially awkward for Kluger? Where does she see connections between her memories and theirs? (92-93)
17. Follow the narration of the GOOD DEED that seems unmotivated but which saved Kluger's life. How do you understand this? (104-109)
18. Why does Kluger tell us what happened to the remaining members of the Theresienstadt family camp? (112)
19. Describe her thoughts on seeing the little boy from the train. (114)
20. Where does her sister Susi enter the picture?
21. How do Susi, Alma, and Ruth escape? Why is their story not like that of Huck Finn? (138)
22. What does the National Socialist Women's Verein (Club) do, and what happens to it? Explain the manna reference.
23. What happened with Einstein? (161)
24. "The Holocaust had no name as yet." When did it acquire one? (181)
25. How does this narrative end? (214)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Courage and Cowardice. The question that often occurs in a description of difficult circumstances is: "What would you do?" On p. 156, Kluger considers not only this question, but also what we can expect of ourselves or others in terms of courage. Read her comments carefully and decide how you would agree or disagree (or both).
2. Family: Describe Kluger's relationship with her mother. When this book appeared in Germany, many were shocked that she would speak of her mother in these terms. When it appeared in the US, Laura Bush gave it to one of her daughters for Christmas because it portrayed "an interesting mother-daughter relationship." What do you think of this relationship?
3. What kind of relationship does Kluger have with her father? With her brother?

4. Kluger suggests that she is not being fair to many of those she writes about. Where does she do this and, if she knows she is being unfair, why does she write what she does?

5. "Damn right, I *am* hard to satisfy!"(184). Our narrator asks a lot of others, and she acknowledges this. Have you found her difficult or difficult to satisfy? Where?