**My Holocaust Memoir**

**by Ben Greenman January 19, 2009**

Dear Ms. Winfrey:

I am a great admirer of your show, and, while I do not watch every day, when I do watch I am always touched in or near my heart. Recently, I was watching “Best Life Week,” in which your guests discussed the challenges that they have overcome, and it occurred to me that the events of my early life, which are the subject of an upcoming book I have just completed, might be perfect for a future episode. I do not expect you to read the entire book, but I wanted to take a moment to review some of the highlights—though “highlights” is a crass, commercial word for such a wrenching memoir.

I was born in Chicago in 1969. Shortly afterward, in 1941, my entire family was rounded up by the authorities and sent to the Theresienstadt camp, along with tens of thousands of other Jews, who hailed principally from Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany. The first few days there, separated from my family, denied even the most basic creature comforts, I was in a state of shock. I could hardly eat or sleep, and, to make matters worse, I had misplaced my cell-phone charger. I felt powerless. (This would not be the first time that a metaphor appeared in time to help make sense of a difficult situation.) I spoke about the charger to everyone. Few understood my plight. Then I met a young woman named Amalie. She was deathly ill, but I could tell from her eyes that she was kind, and the next week my appraisal was confirmed when she handed me a package wrapped in burlap. It was a cell-phone charger, and, though it was completely the wrong kind—flat end, not round, which I was pretty sure I had mentioned to her—it taught me that there was a much more important power source: the human heart. (I trust my publisher implicitly, but I think this might be a good title for the book: “The Most Important Power Source.” There may also be some kind of pun with “bars,” which represent the camp’s prison bars, on the one hand, and cell-phone signal strength, on the other. “Bars You Can Walk Through”? If either of these would increase the likelihood that you might pick my book for your Book Club, please let me know.)

Amalie recovered from her illness. We became friends and then lovers, and after only a few months I asked her to marry me. We staged a secret ceremony, devising rings out of strips cut from our blankets. A week of bliss followed, but at the conclusion of that week, when I went to see her at our usual meeting place, there was an old woman there instead. “Have you become an old woman?” I cried in horror. The old woman told me that Amalie, my Amalie, had been taken away, possibly to Auschwitz. I cried. I cursed the heavens. I considered ending my life by looping the cord from the cell-phone charger over a rafter. But I persevered. Years later, after I escaped to London and then to Boston, Amalie ended up living down the street, married to a friend of mine, and we resumed our love affair. (This is yet another possible title for my memoir: “Back-Door Man.”)

My love for Amalie, set against this backdrop of suffering, would be enough to make for a wonderful memoir. It would tie strings to the heart and then tug on them. But there is more to this incredible tale than just love. Shortly after Amalie left for what I thought was forever, I struck up a friendship with a young man at the camp. His name was Terry Bradshaw. Bradshaw was years away from the career that would bring him fame and glory in professional American football, but his charisma was apparent from the first, as was his athletic skill. There was a ragged baseball that one of the kinder guards had given us, and we used to play catch out in the yard. Bradshaw was not Jewish, but his parents were Romany, or Gypsies, a heritage held in equal disdain by the Nazis. “Sometimes I wish I was never born,” he said, zipping a fastball into the glove I had fashioned from a pillow and some tape. Such human drama!

Bradshaw also had a strong sense of justice. One day, we were playing cards when he suddenly slammed his fist on the table. “This isn’t fair!” he exclaimed. I was cheating, and was worried that he had found me out, but he was speaking more broadly. He felt that the entire concentration camp was not fair, and I admired his clarity. He devised a plan of escape so fiendishly ingenious that I could hardly believe my eyes (when I saw it diagrammed on a piece of paper) or ears (when he turned it right side up and explained it to me). One morning a few weeks later, we were ready to go. He jogged out into the yard with his baseball. “Hey, Fritz,” he said to the guard. “Heads up!” He zinged the baseball at the guard with a fearsome velocity and accuracy, bouncing it cleanly off the man’s head and knocking him cold. It then caromed and dropped another guard, and a third after that, and, when it finally rolled to a halt, it served as a distraction for the vicious guard dog, who went immediately to fetch it. “Good boy,” Bradshaw said. “Get keys.” The dog, which seemed to understand English, trotted off and returned with a ring, which held keys to the guard’s brand-new Leichter Panzerspähwagen. Bradshaw and I hopped in and drove west. I remember it as if it were yesterday: the Rolling Stones’ “I’m Free” was playing on the radio, and we drove until the song was true.

These are the rough outlines of my story, but there are plenty of other details that are sure to entrance and bewitch the average reader—the time I played second base for the Yankees, the time aliens landed in front of the Panzerspähwagen and tried to abduct (and presumably probe) Bradshaw—not to mention film and television executives looking for heartwarming stories of human will and undying love. I know that your lawyers are paid to be suspicious, and I understand. But I can assure you that Terry Bradshaw is a Gypsy. I look forward to your thoughts on “Back-Door Man,” and what is sure to be a fruitful creative partnership.