



One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Alexander Solzheinitsyn

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While there were many earlier sources that described the existence of the Soviet Gulag, this book was the first document that described the camps that was sanctioned by the Soviet authorities. To readers of books about the German and Japanese camps of World War II, the descriptions of life in the Soviet Gulag are all too familiar. Hunger is a constant companion and the inmates jostle and curry favors for slight improvements in food. Even something as simple as an extra pint of watery soup, a small slice of bread or having the dispenser dip the ladle deeper into the kettle are points of significant triumph. In all camps there were those that lied, bullied and otherwise worked to curry favor, but there were also people that maintained their humanity and dignity so that some social society could be maintained. Simple possessions such as spoons and shoes became items of great value. One unusual trait of this book is that Denisovich is described as a man that takes pride in his work, even though he is in essence building his own prison. His work is that of a mason, laying blocks and mortar, building walls and being pleased with the quality of the result. Solzhenitsyn spent several years in a labor camp; his offense was that he criticized Stalin in a letter. Therefore, while this book is labeled a work of fiction, it is of course based on fact; only the names have been changed. -- Charles Ashbacher, Amazon reviews



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