**Lale Sokolov**

For more than 50 years, Lale Sokolov lived with a secret - one born in the horrors of wartime Europe, in a place that witnessed some of the worst of man's inhumanity to man. It would not be shared until he was in his 80s, thousands of miles from that place. Lale had been the Tattooist of Auschwitz. Living out his life in a suburb of Melbourne, the man who had been born Ludwig "Lale" Eisenberg to Jewish parents in Slovakia in 1916 decided to share his story.

In April 1942, aged 26, Lale was taken to Auschwitz, the Nazis' biggest death camp. When the Nazis came to his hometown, Lale had offered himself as a strong, able-bodied young man in the hope that it would save the rest of his family from being split up. Unlike his siblings, he was unemployed and unmarried. At that time, he did not know of the horrors that went on at the camp in occupied south-west Poland. On arrival, the Nazis exchanged his name for a number: 32407.

Prisoner number 32407 was set to work like many others, constructing new housing blocks as the camp expanded. He spent hours working on the rooftops, keeping a low profile from the SS guards and their unpredictable tempers. But shortly after he arrived at Auschwitz, Lale contracted typhoid. He was cared for by the man who had given him his identification tattoo, a French academic named Pepan. Pepan took Lale under his wing and set him to work as his assistant. He taught his trade and how to survive.

It's July 1942 and Lale is handed another piece of paper. In front of him are five digits: 3 4 9 0 2. There was something about the girl he was tattooing and her bright eyes. In in that moment, as he tattooed her number on her left arm, she tattooed her number in his heart. He learned that her name was Gita - she was in the women's camp, Birkenau. In 1945, Gita was one of the women selected to leave Auschwitz. The woman he had fallen in love with was gone. Lale knew only her name - Gita Fuhrmannova - but not where she had come from.

Lale eventually also left the camp and made his way back to his hometown of Krompachy in Czechoslovakia. In a horse and cart, he set off for Bratislava, the entry point for many survivors returning home to Czechoslovakia. Lale waited at the railway station for weeks, until the stationmaster advised him to go to the Red Cross instead. On his way there, a young woman stepped into the street in front of his horse. It was a familiar face. A pair of bright eyes. Gita had found him. The couple married in October 1945 and changed their last name to Sokolov to better fit into Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia.

Eventually Lale and Gita moved to Australia. In 1961, they had a son, Gary. Lale and Gita lived out the rest of their lives in Melbourne. Gita visited Europe a few times before she died in 2003. Lale, on the other hand, never returned. Only close friends knew of the couple's love story.

**Adapted Source: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-42568390**

**Lale Sokolov Questions**

1. How many years did Lale live with a secret for?

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1. How old was Lale when he was taken to Auschwitz?

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1. What was his prison number?

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1. When was Gita selected to leave Auschwitz?

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1. What did Gita and Lale change their last name to?

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1. Who died in 2003?

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Stretch and Challenge

* Why do you think Gita and Lale only discussed the experiences of their past with close friends?
* Do you think that Lale demonstrated tremendous courage and loyalty towards his family, with the choice he made?