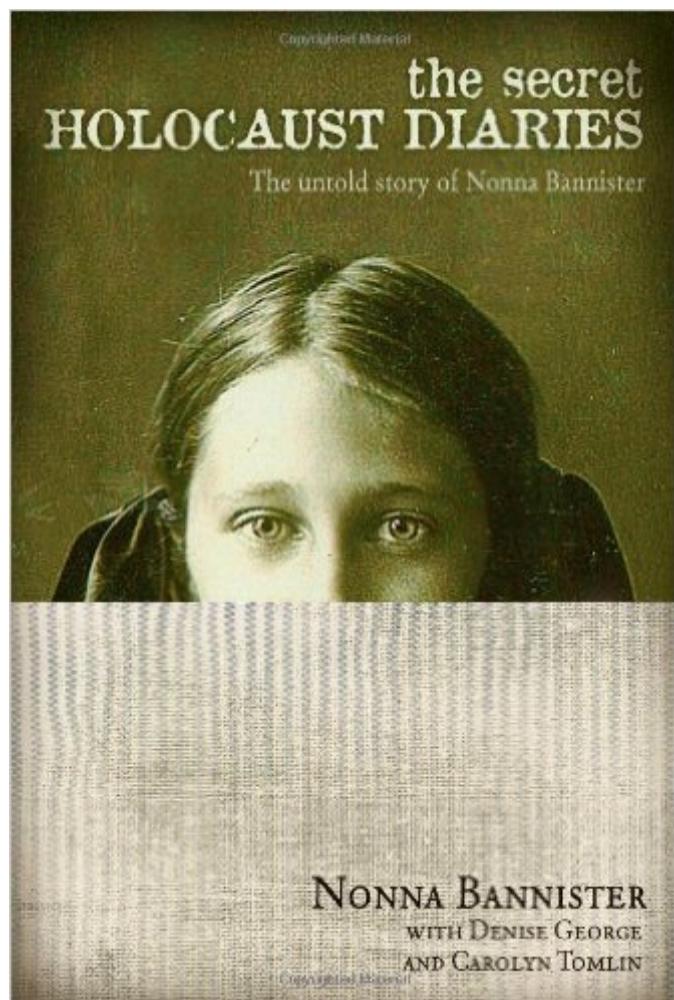


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The Secret Holocaust Diaries: The Untold Story Of Nonna Bannister



Synopsis

Nonna Bannister carried a secret almost to her Tennessee grave: the diaries she kept as a young girl experiencing the horrors of the Holocaust while learning compassion and love for her fellow human beings. Nonna's writings tell the remarkable tale of how a Russian girl, born into a family that had known wealth and privileges, was exposed to the concentration camps and learned the value of human life and the importance of forgiveness.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought The Secret Holocaust Diaries a few weeks ago and started reading it. What an amazing book! Nonna Bannister was a gifted young Russian girl from a loving, warm, and wealthy family. Caught up in the horror of World War II, she watched everything and everyone she knew and loved disintegrate before her eyes. Yet Nonna miraculously survived, with her faith intact and her secret diaries hidden away, known only to her until recently. What is most astonishing to me was Nonna's lack of bitterness and hatred for the perpetrators of the savagery she witnessed--possible only with divine forgiveness, I'm sure, but still difficult to fathom. Reading The Secret Holocaust Diaries is like sitting down to tea with Nonna, as she unveils the secrets carefully packed away in her locked green trunk in the attic. Even her husband didn't learn about her past until their twilight years, when she decided it was finally time to tell him. I'm so glad she decided to share. Nonna's voice is powerful; after I read a passage and close the book, her lovely and heartwrenching prose stays with me. This is the type of book you don't want to read too fast; I'm savoring it, page by page.

[...]When 23-year old Nonna Bannister arrived in the United States in 1950, she closed the door on her disturbing past. She married and raised three children and never told a soul about her experiences in Russia, the Ukraine, and Germany during the Holocaust. After 43 years of marriage, she finally introduced her husband to her past, the photographs and diaries she had miraculously saved and painstakingly transcribed into English. This book is her story. The book, a compilation of Nonna's diary entries and family stories, opens with her 1942 transport from the Ukraine to Poland, bound for a "labor camp" in Germany. The horror is quickly realized as fifteen year old Nonna witnesses firsthand the murderous brutality of the German soldiers toward the Jewish prisoners. After this shocking opening, the editors return us to Nonna's earliest childhood memories and stories about her unusually comfortable life in Russia post-Revolution, embracing family and Russian Orthodox Christian religion as the foundation of her character. Embedded in these childhood tales, Nonna becomes more aware of the outside world and dangerous influences. In the mid-1930s, the communist Soviet laws were heavily enforced, ending her Grandmother's prosperity and Nonna remembers that everything had to be "donated" to the "collective farms." Religion was forbidden and her parents send away her older brother to an unknown location for his safety. Nonna never saw him again. As German troops approach from one front, the family chooses not to evacuate with the retreating Soviets and hide in the cellar. They later learn that Aunts, Uncles, and cousins who did retreat were killed. When the Germans invade in 1941, Nonna and her mother are sent to another village for safety, while her father hides; but he is discovered. The rest of the book cover Nonna's darkest experiences. After her father's death, she and her mother are transported to Germany. Nonna's compassion and brief futile attempt to help a young Jewish boy leads her to be put in the middle of a massacre, where she is miraculously saved by the same boy, who dies seconds later. She survives her experiences at the labor camp and soon her knowledge of five different languages, especially German, is recognized as a valuable asset. She and her mother are moved to a Catholic hospital where Nonna works as a clerical translator and her mother serves as a nurse's aide. But an incident that happened on that first train ride from the Ukraine causes the Gestapo to arrest Nonna's mother and transport her to Ravensbruck and then Flossenbürg. Nonna's story is a valuable contribution as a primary source and witness to the Holocaust. While the editors notes interrupt the flow of the narrative, and should have been added as sidebars or footnotes, they enhance the reader's understanding with background information. The book would benefit greatly from a map showing the various locales discussed, and despite being told that the diaries and photographs survive, there are no photographs included in the book and would be a valuable addition. Don't pass up reading this book because it addresses an uncomfortable topic. If this

teenage girl could live through this and write it as it happened, then we, in our comfort sixty years later, can definitely read it and be witness to her life and the truth. Despite the struggle, this is a tale not only of survival, faith, and courage, but also forgiveness, strength, and hope.

Nonna Bannister left behind the horrors of her European childhood when she relocated to the United States alone. Having lost all of her family, including her brother Anatoly with whom she was quite close to the Nazi regime, Nonna closed the door on her life in Europe and started afresh in the United States. Throughout her marriage, the birth of her children, and her latter years, she did not speak of the immense cruelty she suffered at the hands of the Germans, however one day, she opened her secret place in the attic to her husband. Looking at her journals written in many different languages (Nonna knew at least five fluently) her husband wondered how he would read these memoirs that were written in a tongue he didn't know. It was then that Nonna produced the legal pads. Piles of legal notepads full of her translations. This book is the meat of those notepads. The secret Holocaust Diaries is Nonna's true story of her experiences at the hands of the Germans. It chronicles her childhood before the Germans came to power and continues through her imprisonment at a labor camp through until her death. With a memoir, I feel the story cannot be critiqued because this is not a plot fabricated in the mind of an author--this is a person's life; their experience. Therefore any critique is my opinion on the writing style and/or how much I enjoyed the book. That being said, I don't think 'enjoy' is the correct word to use when referring to reading a true story about the Holocaust. This book was intriguing and poignantly written. I will warn that it is a detailed account of Nonna's experiences and there are some VERY disturbing interactions that take place. What more can one expect from a Holocaust memoir. If you enjoy reading memoirs or Holocaust based titles, this book is a must-read. Again, I would caution however that one should be mindful of the age of those who read this. This book was provided by Tyndale House Publishers for review purposes.

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