



The Lost Childhood: A World War II Memoir

Yehuda Nir

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A gripping, extraordinary memoir of six years in the life of a daring and resourceful Polish Jewish boy and his family, who survived the Holocaust using false papers and posing as Catholics.

Yehuda Nir was nine years old when his father was shot dead by German soldiers in a mass execution of Jewish men in their Polish town. Yehuda, along with his mother and teenage sister, escaped with the aid of false documents. It was 1941--the Holocaust was gaining a grim momentum. The family plunged into what would be four long, harrowing years disguised as Catholics. Never knowing if each day of hiding in the open would be his last, Yehuda was often forced to separate from his mother and sister, live on dogs and mice, hide in sewers, and live in utter chaos.

The Lost Childhood: A World War II Memoir Details

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Ryan L says

I read this book, "The Lost Childhood" by Yehuda Nir, for a school assignment for ELA. I would recommend this book if you like reading about stories of the children holocaust survivors besides Anne Frank. This story is from the view of young Yehuda living as a Polish Jew through World War II. Not to give away the ending but this is a biography. He was nine years old when the Soviet soldiers invade Poland. A short time after the invasion his life was completely turned upside down. His father owned a carpet factory that was very successful. They were a upper middle class family that had a governess, maid and chauffeur on staff at home. Life was good for Yehuda, his sister Lala and their parents. In a blink of an eye that ended, the family changed and sacrifices were made for survival.

I don't want to give away to many details of the story, I don't want to spoil it for any future readers of this book. Yehuda is a clever and resource boy who is able to help himself and his family. They were able to avoid going to concentration camps by hiding in plain view with false papers and becoming Catholic even tho they did not believe in this religion. One of his struggles was the fact that Yehuda looks like a polish person unlike his mother and sister. He is forced in the beginning to stay in doors out of the sight of others. For one of the moves, they decided to dye his hair blond which was hard to maintain and he didn't like doing this. Sometime later he had to go to a barber to get his haircut and hoped the barber would not turn him in as being secretly a pole.

Another struggle he had was when other kids and their mothers thought it was weird that he did not have a picture of his first communion hung over his bed. Yehuda being a jew and not catholic did not have a first communion so had no photo to display. They had tried to explain it as they left it behind and could not get it because of the war. Also they said that they tried to request a copy from the church and family but nothing had come yet by mail. With the fear of be found out as a pole because of one photo, Lala his sister jumped in to help. She used her beauty to talk a male photograph into creating a photo for her. She told a story of how Yehuda died before his first communion and her mother was overwhelmed with grief wanted a photo of her dead son at his first communion. That maybe his photo could bring her comfort for her to move on. This story and Lala's good looks was able to get them the photo they needed. It worked so well that the photo was over the top that it made other people jealous.

I know these are not big events in the story but it reflects how the smallest things like dyeing your hair, getting a haircut and a having a photo could have been the thing that got them caught. They could have been sent to a conservation camp or murder. They hid in plain sight among the people who hated them for their beliefs. Forced to see horrific treat of their people not wanting it to happen to them. Their quick decisions and teamwork help them most of the time. Pick this book up at your local library and give it a try, you won't regret it.

Pamela Shropshire says

This is the story of a well-to-to Polish Jewish family in WW2, told by Yehuda, the son, who is nine years old at the onset. They live in Lvov; the father is a carpet manufacturer - fine, expensive, hand-made carpets. The mother is beautiful, blond and blue-eyed, accustomed to wearing designer clothes and fine jewelry. Lala is

16 and beautiful, but with dark hair and eyes like their father who is of typical Jewish appearance. Yehuda is also has dark hair and eyes.

Early on, the Russians take control of the area; as a capitalist, father doesn't fare well and the family is forced to move into a small apartment. But when the Germans return, the lives of all Jews are very much in danger.

Father is taken early on; he never returns and is presumed dead, which is the case. Mother, Lala and Yehuda obtain false baptismal papers which identify them as Catholic; they use these to hide from the Nazis for the duration.

Mr. Nir is an engaging storyteller and their experiences are fascinating in a very tragic way. They are very, very fortunate among Polish Jews; they survived, with the exception of their father.

Well worth reading.

Moira Crone says

Compelling and frank. The man tell this story is in middle age. He is recounting events when he was nine and ten years old up to fourteen. What I liked best was that he was aware of how the terrible experiences and the persecution and trauma of the war caused him to change his personality, caused him to become a liar, a master of disguise and stealth. The dangers also brought out great bravery in him.

The story had many great scenes which were not dramatized very much, just summarized, It was as if we were outside of the story a little bit, the author was holding back on evoking emotion.

I believe this was because he has, in a way, metabolized all this trauma and he doesn't want to go there again Or he is just not a very vivid writer. Nevertheless the sheer picaresque keeps us moving. I read it to the end and really wanted to return to it when I was away from it. Harrowing. A good old fashioned harrowing book.

George says

How I came to read this book is an interesting story. I was at an art gallery in Manhattan last weekend. A man in his 70's introduced himself as Yehuda Nir, a professor of psychiatry at Cornell Medical Center in NYC. In the course of the conversation, I discovered that, when he was nine years old, he witnessed his father rounded up by the Nazi's, never to be seen again – the first of many relatives, friends, and neighbors murdered during the Holocaust. He escaped by living among Catholics and disguising himself as a Catholic alter boy. He wrote about his five year ordeal – fearing discovery, surviving by ingenuity, wit, and often sheer luck in "The Lost Childhood", a book that has now been translated into seven languages. He had a German translation with him. He is a charming man, with a marvelous sense of humor. I promised to read his book. He asked me to call him when I finished. I said that I would and that I'd meet him for lunch to discuss it. He agreed. I've read about 100 pages so far. It's quite an extraordinary memoir – very engaging and fast paced. I can't wait to finish and meet him again. More to come ... after the lunch meeting!!!

I finished this book on my way to Australia, but haven't yet met the author for lunch. It went very quickly, so I read it again on my way home and took notes, because I have many questions to ask when I meet Dr. Nir again. It's a wonderful book about hope, courage, love, and family. There's no hype, just a straight forward

narrative. It's amazing that Nir survived to tell this story, while millions of others perished -- first the Russians, then the Nazis, then the Russians again. It leaves you wanting to know so much more about his life after 1945. What became of his mother and his sister, who survived with him? How did he end up in NY at Cornell? How did his experience during WW II influence the rest of his life? Although I have a few minor complaints, I highly recommend this book.

Update: I met Dr. Nir for lunch on Friday, April 17, 2009. I visited him in his apartment (which he owns) on Park Avenue, where we spent an hour discussing his book and bits and pieces of his life. I was also given a tour of his 8-room apartment (very elegant!). He has a beautiful 26-year old daughter studying at Columbia University. Every April 20 (Hitler's birth date) he takes his family to a nice restaurant in NY to celebrate the fact that Hitler's dead and he survived. I found this a bit odd, but why not? He's led a fascinating life since 1944. He earned his M. D. degree in the US and is currently teaching at Cornell University Medical Center in NYC. We went to lunch at a nice Indian restaurant on 3rd Avenue, near his home. There was insufficient time to ask all my questions, so we plan to meet again in the near future -- perhaps when I return from Rome.

Wendy says

I read this eons ago and the main thing I remember from it is: WEIRD in a very good way.

Sophia Sandekian says

For me, this book was interesting and sad. I got a different perspective of World War II through the eyes of a boy and how he had to survive. The descriptions Yehuda Nir writes makes it seem like I was with him during the war. How he lived gave me the idea that some people were actually able to survive outside the camps and be caught.

Sooz says

Yehuda Nir was a Polish Jew from an educated professional family. When the war broke out in 1939, his father was executed rather soon, leaving the mother to survive with their son and daughter. This is quite a detailed account of how they were able to manage to survive and stay in touch with each other. Many harrowing close calls. Not especially notable writing craft, but an important and interesting story nevertheless.

Darlene says

An outstanding Holocaust memoir. Fast paced and exciting, it reads like a thriller.

Neeta says

This is a very good autobiography of a Polish Jewish preteen who becomes a teenager during WWII as he hides from the Germans under the guise of a Catholic. There are some coming of age moments and he tells his story in a straight up, matter-of-fact way. Really interesting challenges are highlighted, such as the pressure to show people his nonexistent Communion photo so as not to be discovered as a Jew and how innovative he and his family are in masking their identities. 4.5 stars.

Guy says

While all books about the Holocaust tear at your heart, this book has a happy ending. After experiencing every type of horror possible, a boy and his family survive. The family's survival was the product of a moment by moment, quick decision making process that was masterful.

Nicole Nikitaras says

This book called The Lost Childhood is a very interesting book because it explains how many families had escaped this war where they lived. There's this boy who was the narrative in the story and his family was a really wealthy family. The family didn't seem as scared as other families would be if they were escaping the war and leaving their things behind. There was many conflicts in the story of how they were getting stopped by many soldiers and the carriage they were in had to get every single stop they were at to make sure they wasn't carrying any deadly things. I really recommend this book because if you want to learn about the war and how people and families escaped this is the book for you.

Sarah says

This was a World War II memoir from a young Jewish kid who went into hiding with his sister and mother. I had read several books about the Holocaust that were memoirs of concentration camps, but never one about people in hiding. It really captured the terror the family felt as they struggled to stay safe and pass for non-Jewish Poles, posing as different people and moving to different places when they were at risk of discovery. It seemed like the entire society of Poland was infested with anti-Semitism, there was nobody that was safe to confide in except several other Jews in hiding. It was interesting to read about his experiences in the Polish resistance and learn more about the history of World War II.. At one point the Yir and his family was working for a Nazi official and his family, and became trusted employees favored above others (of course, the Nazis didn't know they were Jewish) There was a passage where Nir says that he would've raped the 12-year-old daughter of the Nazi if she had been older and less ugly. It's sad how the war hardened him from being an innocent kid to be someone who would look at Germans dead bodies with pleasure and contemplate raping a young woman. It seems like the inevitability of surviving in a terrible situation with constant fear and hatred of those who were driving them underground And threatening their lives on a pretty much daily basis.

Travonte Neal says

The Lost Childhood a war world 2 memoir by Yehuda Nir

When Germany invaded his native in in 1939 Yehuda Nir was only nine years old the youngest member of a wealthy Jewish family After his father was taken away and killed Yehuda his older sister Lala and his mother had no choice but to survive on their own Nir and his family tried to make it without his father being there and they did just that.They forged some kind of documents to pass themselves off as Catholics and since they did that they wont end up like the rest of the jewish people and get killed also at the age of 14 Nir put his life at risk and joined the Polish against the Germans .

Jose Aguilar says

The lost childhood

Yehuda Nir; Scholastic books, 283

In this autobiographical book, Yehuda Nir explains his experience during his early childhood. His family lived an upper middle class existence in Lwow, Poland, where Yehuda's father owned a carpet factory. Yehuda was nine when the Germans invaded Poland. Yehuda describes six years of his existence during Nazi occupied Poland during World War II. They rounded up many of the Jewish men, including Yehuda's father and uncle, and marched them into the forest where they executed them with machine guns. Yehuda and his family were able to escape being sent to death camps by the help of his sister's boyfriend, who was an excellent artist and created false documents posing them as Catholics. Yehuda and his family managed to survive in the open pretending to be something they were not, and practicing a religion they did not believe in. He and his sister joined the resistance where he worked as a courier in the sewers and basements of the city. After the fall of Warsaw resistance, the Germans were losing the war, so they sent most of the Warsaw survivors to Germany on trains to serve as slave laborers. Yehuda's mother made many arrangements working as a domestic cleaner for a German family in order to save her son, who was more vulnerable for being a male.

In this exciting book Yehuda portrays World War II from his eyes in a vivid description. Read to see the end result of this heart capturing story. Overall the story was a good book with a good plot. The ending was one to remember, and the vivid details of the author stimulate one's imagination.

Kelly says

This book was a very coarse, no-hold back candid view of WWII. I'm interested in this time period, and this book was different in that this Jewish family was never sent to a concentration camp and was able to hide for over 6 years. the author paytribute throughout the book of his sisters survival skills and heroic behaviors. this boy really never had the chance to be a child. the author was overtly anti-Germans. although I realize he had every reason to hate them but openly talked about deserved deaths and when given the opportunity treated Germans that were kind or at least humane to them, like second class, making sexual advances, and spitting on them. I guess this is war mentally something that I hope not to understand.

