



## Edith's Story

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When Hitler invaded Holland in 1939, Edith van Hessen was a popular Dutch high school student. She also happened to be Jewish. In the same month that Anne Frank's family went into hiding, Edith was sent to live with a courageous Protestant family, took a new name, and survived by posing as a gentile. Ultimately one-third of the hidden Dutch Jews were discovered and murdered; most of Edith's family perished.

Velmans's memoir is based on her teenage diaries, wartime letters, and reflections as an adult survivor. In recounting wartime events and the details of her feelings as the war runs its course, Edith's Story ultimately affirms life, love, and extraordinary courage.

"The most vivid evocation of the experience of Nazi Occupation that I have ever read." - The Independent (London)

## Edith's Story Details

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Author : Edith Velmans , Hester Velmans (Editor)

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# From Reader Review Edith's Story for online ebook

## Hanneke Vlak says

Great book. This reminded me of the stories my parents told us about wartime Holland. My grandmother hid a Jewish family, the de Groot, they lost their son in one of the camps. They survived but my parents never heard from again. Terrible time in Europe. Very readable, i will keep it, it's nearly like a family memoir.

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## Ryan Buckby says

i've said this before and i always will after reading this kind of books, these are the ones that will stick with me for years to come.

This story was completely different to the other three i had read as most ended up the person being in a concentration camp. However this story showed the strength of a girl who went into hiding right under the nazi's noses. It truly showed what lengths some people went to hide and save jewish people from deportation to these horrible camps.

This memoir was beautifully written and a mesmerizing story of a young girl who had to live in constant fear of being found out.

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## chucklethescot says

A great Holocaust memoir. Edith is a young Dutch Jew and we join her story as the Germans invade her country and start a campaign against her religion. Finally, after persecution and the grim life that follows, she is hidden with a family who risk their lives to keep her safe while her family become separated.

It was interesting to get so much detail about the restrictions placed on daily Jewish life-the segregation, curfews, simple things like not being able to visit your friends houses as they were non Jews. It must have been difficult for children to understand why they can't ride a bike or swim in the river or have non Jewish friends. The book also describes how Edith lives with another family, aching for news of whether her family have evaded the death camps. A moving memoir, well written and it keeps you interested throughout. It also shows the bravery of those wonderful people who did whatever they could to save Jews by taking them into their home, knowing the penalty for doing so.

Book Rating: 3.5/5

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## Deb says

A World War II book about the diary of a Jewish girl in hiding in Holland. Sound familiar? It is the diary of Edith who's story is quite a bit different from Anne Frank's. Edith's older brother gets to America before the Nazis come. Her other brother is in the Resistance. Edith lives a relatively normal life until 1943 when she goes to live with a gentile family and has false papers that identify her as a Christian. In the meantime, her

mother and father both become ill. Mom goes to the hospital and lasts a remarkably long time til she is taken to Westerbrock, a holding camp before being sent to Sobibor, a death camp. Her father dies in a nursing home. He's never sent away. Edith is able to visit him one time, but it really is risky for her to travel outside. She essentially becomes the housekeeper for the family with whom she is hiding. She survives the war and meets up with her oldest brother. The story is told both from her diary entries and her memories.

A good edition to the canon of Holocaust literature

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### **Rae says**

Amazing story, well told. I mean I don't even know what to say. Maybe because she didn't go through such horrific experiences as others, though she certainly didn't have it easy, I could relate to it in a different way.

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### **Laura says**

*"I never realized that there could be such suffering in the world, and that anyone could live through it."*  
- Excerpt from Edith's diary, July 1, 1945

This is the story of a carefree childhood interrupted by war. Edith grew up in Holland in a warm and loving family. She kept a diary during these years and the book alternates between diary entries, family letters and her own recollections as an adult. Having both her teenage perspective and her adult perspective gives us a truer picture of this time.

She is 14 when the Germans invade Holland and we see the slow disintegration of her life. At 16, Edith leaves her family, changes her identity, and hides with a Christian family.

This is a moving story. Like all Holocaust memoirs, it is a story of loss and death. It is also a story of courage and humanity.

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### **Shubhada Kale says**

Having read numerous accounts of Anne Frank, I was very optimistic about this book. All my speculations were proved right when I finished this book in a day. Absolutely mesmerizing and beautifully written. Must read for World War II literature readers.

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### **Bruce says**

An interesting memoir of a young girl who survived the Holocaust through the bravery and assistance of righteous gentiles. Using diaries she kept before she went into hiding, letters sent to her during her period of portraying a gentile by family members under the guise of being friends which she kept tho' told not to, a diary kept after liberation and memories Velmans wrote her story later in life. In it she describes her self-doubts, fears and concerns during a horrific period of her life.

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### **Kristen MacGregor says**

This is another great book on the Jewish Holocaust. It's amazing the things these people went through- and to read about their personal thoughts and experiences and think, they're just like me! She was a teenage girl obsessed with boys- just like I was. Not that I was racist and thought she wasn't a "normal" human... it's just that Holocaust victims have been put sort of on a pedestal in my mind as great people in history. When in reality they really WERE just "normal" human beings trying to make it through some terrible circumstances. But anyway, she shares her private story of wearing the Jewish star, going into hiding, and hearing about each of her family members deaths one by one. It's a sad and tragic tale, but a great one for those looking into the Holocaust in a more personal rather than historical way.

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### **Clarice says**

This book is really exciting because it's like a different and new perspective in the time era the Anne Frank's diary was written. Edith was about 15 when the war started and Anne was about 11 so you get more opinions from Edith. I really enjoyed this book because it gives a lot of information about Edith's time in the Netherlands.

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### **Terri Lynn says**

Yes, I have read yet another Holocaust story. This is non-fiction, the story of Edith Van Hessen who was a teenaged girl who was full of herself and seemed too stupid to understand what was going on around her. She just wanted to chase boys and have fun and offered no help to her mother, father and grandmother even as they suffered health problems and the Nazis began marching into her town of The Hague, Holland. Her father worked for an American firm and had gotten visas for all of them but only one son Guus actually left since Grandma was born in Germany and had fled the Nazis and was a woman with no country after being stripped of her German citizenship for being a Jew. They had been advised to go on to the USA and then get a refugee visa for Grandma (there were plenty of people she could stay with until it came through) but no, the Edith's parents waited until it was too late. They also failed to tend to their health- I got sick of reading about Edith's mom's gall bladder attacks and her dad's abscessed teeth and how they didn't get them out. They had the money to afford it. Finally the mother had a fall and broke her hip and had to spend years in a hospital, the dad's abscesses and the irritation led to cancer in his jaw and he wound up in a hospital for the rest of his life and Grandma landed in a nursing home. When they started taking young people away, her brother Jules found a family in another city to take her in with stolen identity papers as a friend to their daughter whose parents were hospitalized.

Immediately Edith had to grow up and put away her selfishness. This is a powerful story and Edith shares every harrowing minute with us. Her story is not just a rehash of other stories. Read- and let your heart be both broken and warmed.

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## **Kirsten says**

An interesting counterpart to The Diary of Anne Frank. I loved the depictions of day-to-day life during the war and occupation. Really fascinating (even when you know it's not going to end well for most of the people.....).

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## **Patricia Hullett says**

A great story of a Dutch Jewish girl that was hidden during the war, the fate of her family and all of the evil that happened during the Nazi Occupation. My heart broke reading this truly moving story.

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## **Holly Varner says**

This is an amazing story! The family's journey through WWII and the losses they suffered at the German's hands is well written here. The ravages to the Jews is eloquently explained in these pages - truly devastating. This is a tear jerker!

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## **Ian says**

Numerous times while reading this book, tears welled in my eyes and I felt shaky. Edith Velmans' descriptions of her life in Nazi-occupied Holland resounded so closely to my mother's that I felt I was reading the diary of a family friend of hers, except for one thing: my mother and her family didn't change their names and "dive" in order to hide their Jewish identity... But that's a whole different story and book, a book I one day hope to write.

Indeed, Edith was a teenager just a few years older than my mother when the Germans invaded the Netherlands, and the occupation evolved from a political curiosity to a nuisance to something twisted and sinister that meant life and death to those of Jewish descent and those that tried to help them and resist. The author uses excerpts from her diaries, letters from relatives, and her later recollections to craft a narrative that really takes you into that period of Dutch history. It starts with her somewhat childish antics as a young teen just before the war, her fear and excitement with the invasion, the puzzlement and absurdity of labeling your clothes with the Jewish Star of David badge, and then the ultimate decision with her parents to send her and her brother into hiding.

One aspect that hits home is how regular everything in daily life was, right up until it wasn't. Her family photos show birthday celebrations, school sporting events, fun times with high-school friends on the family sailboat, right up until the month she was taken in by a Christian family in another town as household help, and her brother went off to join the underground in the eastern part of the country. What happens next is on one hand heartbreaking, as family members and various friends and acquaintances typically disappear into the Nazi deportation machinery, and on the other hand a testament to optimism and human resilience, as she matures and waits out the war helping those around her as best she can. It is a very well written counterpoint.

Thank goodness that the author kept so much of her own and her family members' writings! There is one

note from her mother, given to her earlier in the occupation after Edith was the butt of a racist incident at school, and I think it sums up the mood of the book and the theme of this period in history quite well.

Just as God created nature and the sun to shine over the world, so that everything may look radiant and joyful, do did He also invent rain, which depressing as it can be is nevertheless crucial to life, since it provides us with food and water.

So it is in our own lives, darling. There are all sorts of disappointments we have to deal with, humiliations, sorrow, shame, grief, etc....But we also have our share of happiness, success, love, and lots more. Now in your case, you just had a terrible disappointment because of the gross insult you experienced. But you must also take into account who did this to you, and then my darling, perhaps you can tolerate it more easily...and think 'Someone like this can't insult me.' Your true friends remain your friends, and you have made plenty of those in your short life...

A heavy burden has been imposed on us now, on you and on thousands of others, and we must try, whatever comes, to keep our heads high...That will depend on our will-power and self-confidence. Yes, if we didn't have those, life would not be worth living. I compare this time that we Jews are living through now, to a little child that is being bullied by a big boy who wants to grab him and wrestle him to the ground.

Nothing lasts forever, my dear. As long as you know that I for one am with you, and together we will head forward, with open eyes and an open heart! God will protect us if we stay true to our course, keeping in mind our responsibilities and duties to ourselves and to our fellow man.

Although it may seem trite, given what happened to so many of the Jewish people who had faith in their fellow man, the words resound with me. The sentiment and unfolding of historical events was so authentic to me, providing another level of understanding of what my family went through, even if a few mysteries remain for me yet to discover.

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