



Behind the Secret Window

By Nellie Toll

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Illustrated with Nelly's original watercolors, this powerful memoir tells the true story of how a little girl's imagination helped her survive World War II.

The Nazis come to Poland when Nelly is six. By the time she turns eight, the events of World War II have taken almost everyone she loves. Scared, lonely, and running from the Nazis, Nelly hides in the bedroom of a Gentile couple in Lwow, Poland. For over a year, she lives in fear of discovery, writing in her diary and painting pictures of a fantasy world filled with open skies and happy families.

For 13 months during World War II, the author and her mother were hidden from the Nazis. Like Anne Frank, Nelly kept a diary and through that outlet transformed her grim reality into an enchanting fantasy world.

"Without emphasizing horror and loss, Toll conveys the effects of human evil and human folly, summoning up the forces of tragedy and courage." --*Publishers Weekly*

"In Toll's remembrance, art equals hope: her happy family pictures, painted in the secret room where she and her mother hid from the Nazis and the Poles, show extraordinary preteen talent as well as the will to survive." --*Kirkus Reviews*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Toll was only six years old when the Nazis marched into her native Lwow (Poland) in 1941. Although her childhood had been shattered two years earlier by the advent of the Russian Army, she and her family were to undergo the full depredations of the Nazis' anti-Semitism. In a remarkably even yet childlike tone, Toll describes persecution by neighbors and former servants as well as the Germans, and we watch as her world shrinks, from an affluent home to cramped quarters in a ghetto to a tiny, hidden room in the Gentile part of town. With her mother, Toll spent more than a year in hiding, dependent on the goodwill of their mercurial Polish patrons, who more than once lost their courage and almost evicted the refugees. While her mother fended off the unwanted attentions of their host and while everyone dodged the suspicions of neighbors, Toll wrote stories and painted pictures, conjuring for herself the pleasures of a normal childhood. Twenty-nine of her watercolors are included here; their poignancy is matched only by the art in *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. Without emphasizing horror and loss, Toll conveys the effects of human evil and human folly, summoning up the forces of tragedy and courage. Ages 10-up. (Apr.) It's raining cats and more cats: Mexican villagers relish the antics of *The Twenty-Five Mixtec Cats* (Tambourine).

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From Kirkus Reviews

In Toll's remembrance, art equals hope: her happy family pictures, painted in the secret room where she and her mother hid from the Nazis and the Poles, show extraordinary preteen talent (some of the 29 powerfully evocative paintings reproduced here now hang in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Israel) as well as the will to survive. Nelly's plight--going from bonbons served on silver platters to hiding behind false walls--was not atypical. In some ways reminiscent of *Maus*, this emotionally complex and informative memoir reports the willingness of some neighbors to turn in Jews for a bag of potatoes and a bottle of vodka. Adults are keenly observed: a tutor nearly becomes a sex offender; the paranoid man who hides Nelly is both horrifying (wife-beating) and funny (he parades through town with a stack of hats on his head, ... *la Caps for Sale*). The poignancy is heightened by evocative language ("minutes walked by with small steps") and raw emotional hunger ("waiting, waiting for Papa"), and by the postwar rush to reconstitute families by swift remarriages--not seen in many Holocaust books, but an important aspect of healing (cf. Ruth Minsky Sender's *To Life*, 1988). (Nonfiction. 10+) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

About the Author

Dr. Nelly S. Toll came to America in 1951. She holds a master's degree in art and art history and education from Rutgers University, has studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and received her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. She has exhibited her adult work widely and has taught both art and art history. Dr. Toll also holds a master's degree in counseling from Glassboro College and a degree in art therapy from Hahnemann University; she has combined both fields as a counselor working with young people.

Her sixty-four watercolor paintings from the thirteen months she spent in hiding in Poland during World War II have been shown around the world. Eight are in the permanent collection of the Yad Vashem Museum in Israel.

She is also the co-author of a play based on her wartime experiences and the author of *Without Surrender: Art of the Holocaust*.

Users Review

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