



The Upstairs Room

Johanna Reiss

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In the part of the marketplace where flowers had been sold twice a week - tulips in the spring, roses in the summer - stood German tanks and German soldiers. Annie de Leeuw was eight years old in 1940 when the Germans attacked Holland and marched into the town of Winterswijk where she lived. Annie was ten when, because she was Jewish and in great danger of being captured by the invaders, she and her sister Sini had to leave their father, mother, and older sister Rachel to go into hiding in the upstairs room of a remote farmhouse.

Johanna de Leeuw Reiss has written a remarkably fresh and moving account of her own experiences as a young girl during World War II. Like many adults, she was innocent of the German plans for Jews, and she might have gone to a labor camp as scores of families did. "It won't be for long and the Germans have told us we'll be treated well," those families said. "What can happen?" They did not know, and they could not imagine... but millions of Jews found out.

The Upstairs Room Details

Date : Published October 30th 1990 by HarperCollins (first published 1972)

ISBN : 9780064403702

Author : Johanna Reiss

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, World War II, Holocaust, Childrens, War, Fiction, Middle Grade, Literature, Jewish

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Cambria says

"The Upstairs Room", a novel by Johanna Reiss, tells the powerful story of Annie, a young Jew who lives through World War II. It follows her life as she survives through the war. Annie de Leeuw is a seven-year-old girl who life changes in an instant. Before the war, she lived in Holland with her mother, father, and two sisters, Rachel and Sini. One day, a tree in the commons begins to give rules about what Jews can do and what they can't. They have regulated recreation hours, a law that forbids them to go to school, and a train that suspiciously picks up Jews to do works for the Germans. Many families around them begin to move to America. Annie, however, must stay in Holland to aid for her mother who is very sick. The war continues to grow along with the action that the novel contains as Annie and her sister Sini go into hiding. With the Germans searching for them, the book keeps the reader on the edge of their seat. The book did, however, begin to get repetitive as Annie and Sini had some days where they did the same things over and over again. On the other hand, when you are in hiding, your activities are very limited. Overall, it was a very exciting novel that revealed many truths about the war and what was really going on. It gave me so much perspective on life and made me feel even more fortunate for what I have. I enjoyed "The Upstairs Room" and it will be a novel that I remember forever!

Sarah says

I read this book for the bookclub I am in and to be honest, when I found out this was what we were reading this month I was a little disappointed. This is why it is very important not to judge a book by its cover (or title or blurb). It turns out this is a very good book, following the story of two Jewish girls who live in hiding. It was very eye-opening. And this is a true story, an autobiography which is totally breathtaking. I really enjoyed this book.

Karen says

I did a book report on this in 5th grade, and was reminded of it when I read "Night" with my niece recently. I could not for the life of me remember the title, so I spent about an hour searching things I remembered from it all over the internet, and behold: the power of the 21st century brought this book back to me. I was as emotionally moved by it now as when I read it at age 10. But now I see the clever writing, how the sentence structure changes as the main character goes from age 6 to 13. Also, the dialogue becomes more internalized as she has less contact with other people. Even though I know everyone lives and remember the happy ending, I was sucked into the fear and boredom of Annie's days in hiding. I highly recommend this book to middle school readers.

Sienna says

This is another really great book for readers who are interested in World War 2 and the Holocaust. Although the story doesn't portray such a vivid picture of the horrors of the Holocaust such as The Diary of Anne

Frank does, it's still a very interesting and powerful story. If you like learning about the Holocaust but not the really sad parts, this is the book for you! The story takes place in Holland and is the true account (or biography) of a young girl named Annie living during the time when Hitler was taking over Holland and other countries and persecuting Jews. Annie and her family are Jewish and have to go into hiding. Only her mom stays behind because she is sick in a hospital. The rest of her family splits up in hiding so it will be less dangerous. Annie and her older sister Sini go to live with the Hanninks, a family who is friends with their family. Then one day the father of the Hanninks thinks that the Germans suspect them and so he takes them to someone else's house in a different town. The people they now live with are a couple and an old woman who live together in a farmhouse. The Hannink's father says he'll take the girls back after two weeks at the most, but he doesn't come back. The girls start to get used to living with the couple, Johan and Dientje, and Dientje's mother, Opoe. But life for them is still really dull because they usually have to stay in the upstairs room of the house all alone to be hidden from the Nazis. They soon become well bonded with the couple and old woman as if they were family. It's a beautiful story about the struggle and hardship of living in hiding and the relationships of people through human love.

Letty Moran says

This book is so good it is based on Johanna's real life and it teaches you many life skills like caring, bravery, sacrifice, kindness and love. I don't know why you would not want to read this book. It is history. I love it.

Virginia Messina says

This is the author's own story—written for her children—of what it was like to live in a single room for three years, hiding from the Nazis, and losing precious years of childhood. She was 8 years old when she went into hiding along with her teenage sister. Because she lived this story and is a fine writer, Johanna Reiss does an outstanding job of depicting what a life in hiding is like for a child, especially one who doesn't quite understand what is at stake. She also portrays her protectors—an uneducated farm family—with warmth and honesty. They were frankly terrified and not very enthusiastic at first, but found themselves drawn into a commitment to keep the girls safe for the rest of the war against some incredible odds. Holocaust memoirs tend to be extraordinary, and this one is no exception.

Ojon Van Strijland says

gelezen in 1974 en nu in deze nieuwe uitgave uit 2018.

De vertaling is hier en daar iets aangepast, het boek nog steeds mooi om te lezen...

Het boek verscheen in 1972 eerst in het Engels, twee jaar later in het Nederlands. De vertaling is van Bob den Uyl.

Alexa SOF2014 says

Even though The Upstairs Room by Johanna Reiss is fiction it gave me great insight into life during World

War II in Holland. Annie DeLeeuw was eight years old when the German army occupied Holland. She and her Jewish family are abused and prohibited from leaving the country. Annie and her sister Sini are hidden from the Germans by the Hannick family. Within a few weeks they move in with the Oostervelds a Christian family, who are very kind. Annie and Sini live with their huge family. Unfortunately, the girls have to live in a cold and drab upstairs room of a farmhouse for almost two and a half years. When the Germans create headquarters outside the Oosterveld's living room they need to be very quiet. Fortunately, the Germans finally leave and are chased back to Germany by Canadians. In the end Annie and Sini can start a new life.

I can't imagine living through war time. Luckily the girls met a very kind family who hid them from the Germans. I enjoyed reading this book of historical fiction. It gave me insight into German occupied Holland during WWII.

I would give this easy to read excellent novel 3 stars! I really enjoyed the character development and the description of life in Holland during WWII. At times it got boring and tedious but overall is was a great book. We are so fortunate to live in a world in the U.S where we don't have to hide from enemies and live in a democracy.

Holly Splawn says

I didn't realize this was autobiographical until I finished the book and read the note at the end. Now I HAVE to read the sequel.

Lindsay says

I read this book originally as a 4th grader. In undergrad, as a sophomore in a class called "Jews and Anti-Semitism," I did an Honors Option where my professor (noted Holocaust scholar Kenneth Waltzer) assigned us to investigate true-life Holocaust memoirs. I picked this book, since I read it to pieces as a child, and I liked the way it had a quasi-happy ending (something you don't often get from Holocaust stories). I also managed to find the author on the Internet and wrote her a letter, to which she responded quite kindly. It is one of my most prized possessions, because I never thought she would write back, as it would be easy to blow off an American college student when you're elderly and living in Europe. I highly recommend this book and commend the author for all of her dedication to educating children.

Kirsten says

I think because I have read many books about WWII--fiction and non-fiction alike, this book for me pales in comparison to them. It is definitely an easy read, and of course the subject matter is interesting, but I felt like nothing really happened. The author didn't adequately convey the despair those poor Jews must have felt at having to hide for so long. If the characters were more endearing, and their development stronger, I would have liked this book a lot more.

Melody says

What a great book. So glad I happened on it.

Sue says

There are all sorts of comparisons that can be made between this and Anne Frank's "Diary of a Young Girl". Both focus on Jewish girls who happen to be named Anne who are forced into hiding during WWII. I found I enjoyed this one more than "Diary". For some reason, I found I had a better sense of the hardships and fears with this one than the other. Maybe that is because this was written by an adult looking back on the experiences instead of a teen in the midst of the experiences. This one seemed to flow better - again, it was a planned out story rather than the publishing of journal entries. I had found a copy when I was cleaning out a bookshelf recently and would have classified this as YA but all four local library systems catalog this as children's. I consider this a well-written account of a specific time in history.

Edwina Callan says

This is the true story of 2 Jewish girls who go into hiding during WW2 and even though it is a "young adult" book, it held my interest and kept my eyes flying across the pages to find out what would happen to these poor girls next.

Jungho L. says

The Upstairs room was about a Jewish family during the Holocaust. They live in Holland when the war happens and they are forced to move away from their homes in order to be safe from the Nazi's. The family are split up later in the book and they go to other family's houses to hide from the Nazi. They are fortunate of not getting caught but they almost do. They survive the war and live happily every after.

I think this book was very fun to read because it was so well in detail. I felt like I was actually in the story. One part in particular was when the Germans came into a house to see if any Jews were hiding in there(which there were). It told us the noises, the Jew's feelings, and their thoughts when this event happened. Also this book was very interesting because I learned many new things about what the Jewish people had to deal with in the other family's home. Because in the story, it states that they always had to stay supper quiet and they weren't allowed outside. That was a fact I did not know about. Also that the Nazi's even took Jews from hospitals to concentration camps. This book made me feel more hatred towards the Nazi's and Hitler. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in mind tingling stories and are eager to know more about the Jewish life during the Holocaust because the story made me really anxious and it was very hard to predict and also because it taught us a lot about the daily Jewish life during the Holocaust. And also I would like to recommend this book to people who enjoy adventure books because there is a lot of fun and exciting adventures in this book.

Farhana Baki says

I remember this book so fondly. I picked it up one day and it has been one of my favorite tales. The story is about two Jewish sisters hiding out in a trap room behind a closet in the upstairs room (hence the title) of a helping family during World War II. They were trapped in the room for months hiding however one day the sisters risked to be outside and felt the warm glistening of the sun. I have an attachment to the sun, it's warmth and sense of freedom it imbues. I could not imagine the based on true event of this book ever happening to me. I appreciated the history, the suffering, and how the story was beautifully written about a horrible time in our history through the experience of two Jewish children. It's a book where the book is categorized as fiction but truly the story is a nonfiction.

Tiffany Wacaser says

I had never heard of this little book, but happened upon it at the library while my kids were at storytime. It is a true story of two Jewish girls who lived with a Dutch family, secretly, for two years at the end of World War II. The story is told from the younger girl's perspective and is related simply without excessive emotion or excessive explanations. Without embellishment you see the way events unfolded for the Jews in Holland as they faced uncertainty and then great fear when the Germans invaded and then occupied Holland.

The story doesn't go into a lot of detail about what happened to those Jews who were taken to camps and then killed. But it lies in the back of the mind of the reader throughout the story. What is remarkable is that the family who hid the girls grew to love them very much. This is a story about courage and relationships as much as it is about the war.

The author said she wrote the book to record her history for her daughters. As such, it is a touching book. I think it would be a good introduction to the Holocaust for younger readers.

In comparing it to The Diary of Anne Frank, I would have to say that Anne Frank's diary is much more intense because she lived in Amsterdam and the fear of being discovered was much more frightening. And of course, we know that Anne was caught and died at a camp. What makes The Upstairs Room different is that she survived and had to live with what had happened to her and many others. It seems she transcended her experiences and lived a good life.

But be prepared, the last page probably describes all the emotion, tension and fear of the two years of hiding in a sentence that somehow makes the impact that much more powerful than if it had been repeated over and over again throughout the book.

Emily says

The upstairs room is about a girl that is Jewish and she is about 12 years old. The German war is going on, and she is hiding from the Nazis.

I don't recommend this book I thought it was kind of boring but that's my opinion. If you are looking for a book that you can just sit down and read, read this one.

I thought it was cool how they dyed their hair at the beginning of the story. I thought it was a good spot where they were hiding but I feel like they could have hidden better like in the walls or something. I give this book a 1 out of 5 stars it was not that good. I think i'm going to read the diary of Anne Frank next.

Becca says

I read this to the kids for History as it's a story of a young Jewish girl who had to go into hiding in Holland during WWII. It's the author's true story and made very real through her writing. I loved the "Postscript" as the author shared her experience as an adult, taking her daughters back to Holland to see the house where she hid, meet the family that hid her, and see her old hiding place. It was emotional for me envisioning that.

Stephanie says

I was disappointed in this Newbery Honor book. Although it was interesting to get the perspective of a child and her experience & understanding (or lack thereof) of the situation she was in, the swearing really bothered me and made it a book I wouldn't recommend to children or keep on my shelf. I don't know many kids who would stick with this story anyway; it was rather boring - which accurately reflected the author's experience - but even the parts that should have been suspenseful felt flat and detached. It was a basic survival story devoid of faith.
