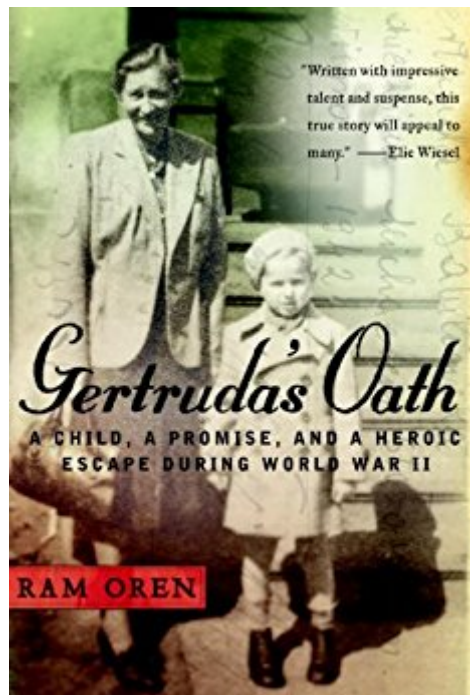


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Gertruda's Oath: A Child, A Promise, And A Heroic Escape During World War II



Synopsis

Trapped in the horrors of World War II, a woman and a child embark on a journey of survival in this page-turning true story that recalls the power and the poignancy of Schindler's List. Michael Stolowitzky, the only son of a wealthy Jewish family in Poland, was just three years old when war broke out and the family lost everything. His father, desperate to settle his business affairs, travels to France, leaving Michael in the care of his mother and Gertruda Bablinska, a Catholic nanny devoted to the family. When Michael's mother has a stroke, Gertruda promises the dying woman that she will make her way to Palestine and raise him as her own son. Written with the invaluable assistance of Michael, now seventy-two and living in New York City, GERTRUDA'S OATH re-creates Michael and Gertruda's amazing journey. Gripping vignettes bring to life the people who helped ensure their survival, including SS officer Karl Rink, who made it his mission to save Jews after his own Jewish wife was murdered; Rink's daughter, Helga, who escaped to a kibbutz, where she lived until her recent death; and the Jewish physician Dr. Berman, who aided Michael and Gertruda through the worst of times. GERTRUDA'S OATH is a story of extraordinary courage and moral strength in the face of horrific events. Like Schindler's List, it transcends history and religion to reveal the compassion and hope that miraculously thrives in a world immersed in war without end. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Gertruda's Oath contains the stories of several different players, all of which will intersect and interact throughout this story of the Holocaust. First there is Gertruda, a Polish Catholic who moves from her village to Warsaw in the hopes of finding employment after being jilted on her wedding day. Next, the Jewish Stolowitzky family, wealthy enough to be dubbed "the Rockefellers of Poland" and occupants of a vast mansion who are looking for a nanny. Finally, the Rink family: Karl, his wife Mira, and their daughter, Helga. Although Mira is Jewish, Karl, who is unemployed, is lured by the promises of financial stability and the glow of patriotism to become an SS officer. As war nears, all our characters make life altering decisions: after wrestling with her conscience and discussing matters with her priest, Gertruda decides that she can morally work for a Jewish family; Jacob Stolowitzky travels into Nazi Germany believing his status as a wealthy foreign businessman will allow him to visit his plants and clear up financial concerns in that country; and Karl Rink tells his wife that since he is a valued member of the SS, his superiors will accept their marriage in time. Once the war begins, the intense ramifications of these choices become evident. Gertruda promises Lydia Stolowitzky that she will protect her charge, Michael, like he is her own son, an oath that will cross her path with the Rink family and give her life a single, consuming focus. This book, based on a true story compiled from interviews with the surviving characters and analysis of historical documents, is highly recommended. Michael and Gertruda interact with the worst humanity has to offer, but also the best.

Numerous memoirs of the Holocaust have been published, and no doubt many are yet to be published. Most of these fall into a particular genre. They chronicle someone's experience of one of the darkest periods in human history. They are heroic tales of personal triumph against overwhelming odds. The great majority leave the reader depressed. After all, how many pages of graphic description of man's inhumanity to one's fellow human beings can one read without vicariously experiencing the events through which the author went? Gertruda's Oath is different. It does not minimize the horrors of the Holocaust. They are there, but they hover in the background like a dark cloud above the horizon. The focus of the narrative is the relationship between Michael, a small Jewish boy, and his nanny, Gertruda Babilinska, a Polish Catholic Christian. It is also the story of how the fate of a Jewish family and that of the family of a SS officer are determined by the

choices made by individuals in response to forces beyond their control. Michael's parents, Jacob and Lydia Stolowitzky, are one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Poland. Because of their immense wealth, the Stolowitzkys are able to live among and mix socially with the Polish upper class, despite the latter's anti-Semitism, which is soon to be unleashed by the German invasion. Lydia is oblivious to reality, shielded as she is by her wealth and her obsession with her son. Jacob, aware of the rising tide of anti-Semitism, feels that his wealth will protect his family, just as it did his ancestors. Gertruda comes from a devout Roman Catholic, peasant family. She shares the anti-Semitism that permeates European society during the inter-war years.

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