



Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp

By Helga Weiss

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“A sacred reminder of what so many millions suffered, and only a few survived.”—Adam Kirsch, *New Republic*

In 1939, Helga Weiss was a young Jewish schoolgirl in Prague. Along with some 45,000 Jews living in the city, Helga’s family endured the first wave of the Nazi invasion: her father was denied work; she was forbidden from attending regular school. As Helga witnessed the increasing Nazi brutality, she began documenting her experiences in a diary.

In 1941, Helga and her parents were sent to the concentration camp of Terezín. There, Helga continued to write with astonishing insight about her daily life: the squalid living quarters, the cruel rationing of food, and the executions—as well as the moments of joy and hope that persisted in even the worst conditions. In 1944, Helga and her family were sent to Auschwitz. Before she left, Helga’s uncle, who worked in the Terezín records department, hid her diary and drawings in a brick wall. Miraculously, he was able to reclaim them for her after the war.

Of the 15,000 children brought to Terezín and later deported to Auschwitz, only 100 survived. Helga was one of them. Reconstructed from her original notebooks, the diary is presented here in its entirety. With an introduction by Francine Prose, a revealing interview between translator Neil Bermel and Helga, and the artwork Helga made during her time at Terezín, *Helga's Diary* stands as a vivid and utterly unique historical document.

16 color paintings; 12 photographs

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Editorial Review

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As the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles dramatically, the potency of firsthand accounts increases with each passing year. Weiss' adolescent diary begins in Prague in 1938 with the Nazi occupation and ends shortly before her deportation from the Terezin concentration camp to Auschwitz in September 1944. Preserved by her uncle, who bricked it into a barracks wall at Terezin, her diary was completed after the war by her recording of later experiences at the Auschwitz, Freiberg, and Mauthausen camps. Illustrated with family photographs and her own paintings and drawings, *Helga's Diary* serves as a remarkable testament to her horrific journey and the ultimate resiliency of youth. Since so few of the approximately 15,000 children interred in Terezin survived, *Helga's Diary*, like the collective reminiscences in Hannelore Brenner's *The Girls of Room 28* (2009), must speak for all the young voices that were prematurely stifled. --Margaret Flanagan

Review

"The most moving Holocaust diary published since Anne Frank." (The Telegraph)

"Written in spare prose and infused with a touching mixture of a child's drive for discovery and an adult's dread of a wartime future, *Helga's Diary* touches raw nerves and contains the potential to send shock waves through the oeuvre of Holocaust memoirs." (Linda F. Burghardt - Jewish Book World)

"Resounds with a ferocious will to endure conditions of astonishing cruelty." (David Casarani - New Statesman)

"A breathtaking account...a chilling testament to the tragedy of the Holocaust." (Publishers Weekly)

"What's startling, throughout, is the resilience with which her buoyant spirit keeps bobbing up past the hardships, indignities, and cruelties of her captors." (Francine Prose)

"At times the struggle of this young girl in the face of evil becomes so real that you'll notice yourself adjusting your blanket and thermostat right along with her as she shivers in the worst of conditions." (The Daily Beast)

About the Author

Helga Weiss was born in Prague in 1929. After surviving the Holocaust and the Second World War, Helga returned to Prague, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, and became an artist. She has two children, three grandchildren, and lives to this day in the apartment where she was born.

Francine Prose is the author of sixteen books of fiction, including *Blue Angel*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. Among her most recent works of nonfiction is the highly acclaimed *Anne Frank: The Book, The Life, The Afterlife*. A former president of PEN American Center, she lives in New York City.

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