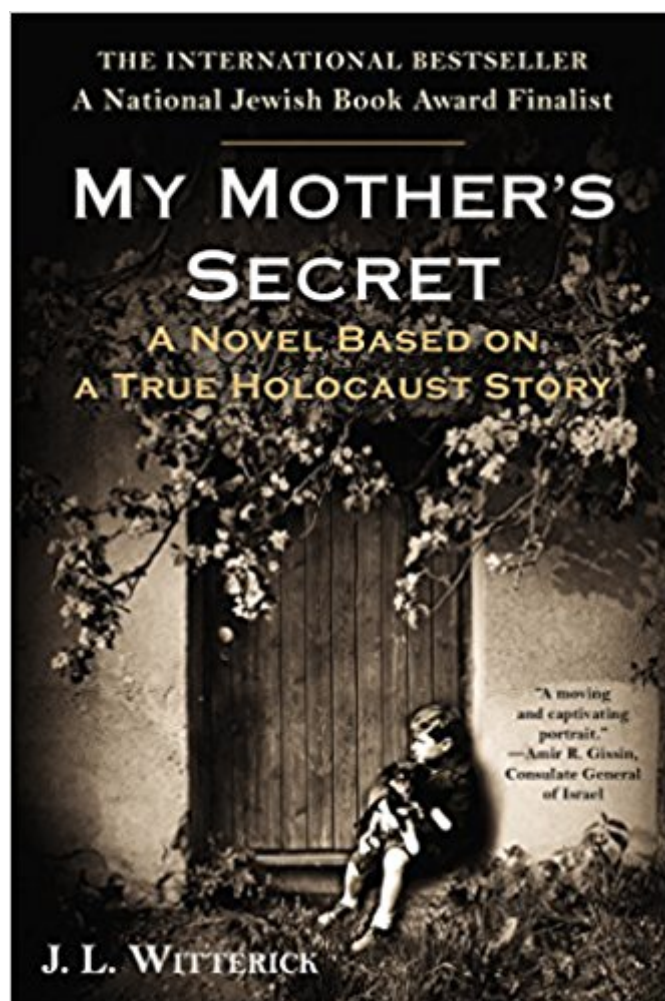


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My Mother's Secret: A Novel Based On A True Holocaust Story



Synopsis

Inspired by a true story, *My Mother's Secret* is a captivating and ultimately uplifting tale intertwining the lives of two Jewish families in hiding from the Nazis, a fleeing German soldier, and the mother and daughter who save them all. Franciszka and her daughter, Helena, are simple, ordinary people...until 1939, when the Nazis invade their homeland. Providing shelter to Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland is a death sentence, but Franciszka and Helena do exactly that. In their tiny home in Sokal, they hide a Jewish family in a loft above their pigsty, a Jewish doctor with his wife and son in a makeshift cellar under the kitchen, and a defecting German soldier in the attic—each party completely unknown to the others. For everyone to survive, Franciszka will have to outsmart her neighbors and the German commander. Told simply and succinctly from four different perspectives—all under one roof—*My Mother's Secret* is a testament to the kindness, courage, and generosity of ordinary people who chose to be extraordinary.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“A moving and captivating portrait.” —Amir R. Gissin, Consulate General of Israel
“A reflection of our own era, a reminder of how far wrong we can be led...an important book.” —Joseph Kertes, author of *Gratitude*, winner of the Canadian Jewish Book Award
“The woman at the heart of this novel will haunt you after you read about her fearless compassion, her defiance of the odds of survival.” —Anna Porter, award-winning author of *Kasztner's Train*

J.L. Witterick is the international bestselling author of *My Mother's Secret*. It was always her

passion to create a story about how anything is possible if we connect with each other through kindness, understanding, and courage. Originally from Taiwan, she has been living in Canada since her family's arrival in 1968.

J.L. Witterick's "My Mother's Secret" isn't a long book, but it tells a huge story from the time of the Holocaust. The author's spare but poetic writing style tells the story of Franciszka Halamajowa and her daughter, Helena, who lived in Poland during the time that the country was occupied by Nazis during WWII. The women lived in a small house with an outbuilding that was near the home. Franciszka has moved with her daughter back to Poland from Germany because her husband is a Nazi sympathizer, and she is anything but, totally against Hitler and the Nazis. Franciszka, although known as a friendly and nice woman living in Sokal, Poland, frequently invites a German commander to her home for dinner, and they have interesting conversations and the best meals that she can prepare, given the situation. Little does the German commander know that Franciszka and Helena are harboring and hiding Jews in their attic and in addition to those people, they are hiding a German soldier who was desperate to avoid his next orders. Her plan of keeping her enemy close while hiding the very people he hated was extremely clever. Before the war there were 6000 Jews in Sokal, and after the war there were 30 left, and Franciszka was responsible for saving half of them. In the book, she doesn't hide as many as 15, but the ones she does hide are in such cramped quarters that it is hard to bear. This is such a heartwarming story that you cheer all the way through the book for Franciszka and her hidden friends, but at the same time know that at any minute something could happen when the German commander is there to give her secret away. Besides her daughter, Helena, Franciszka has a son who is fighting in the war. J.L. Witterick wrote this as a Young Adult book in hopes that children born after the Second World War would learn about the war and the Holocaust and the good things that people like Franciszka did. The book is divided into individual sections which are then divided into chapters, and each section is narrated by a character. I loved the book and it is very suitable for adults to read, too. It's a wonderful teaching aid and both a heartwarming and at times a heartbreaking story to take in. I highly recommend it. "When we have much to lose, but still choose to do the right thing, we uncover the nobility that is within all of us. To endure what is unbearable and to do it with grace, that is how we know that we have arrived." J.L. Witterick.

Some of the characters in this book, were not only well-developed, but deeply articulated. The story, was obviously, going to have an expected ending; but the manner in which this ending was

reached, was what made this story interesting and at times, gripping. This story, more than some others, caused the reader to focus on the person risking everything to defy the Nazis, and treat Jews as humans; well worthy of care, compassion and even risk; but it does not neglect to any great extent, the Jews who were hiding and hoping, in this home and story. I enjoyed this story and will read it again and again.

A really great story set in a horrific time and location. Well developed characters make this a page turner as well. I really looked forward to going back to this story as my busy days ended. Set in Nazi Germany, it does not dwell on the horrors but is from the point of view of non Jews in Poland. This gives more reality to the characters and story. I recommend this book to everyone.

I enjoyed reading this well written book. There is always some violence in the history of events. But I realize it is there and was not offended by anything that is the truth, sad as it may be. Reality is difficult to avoid some details, but must be told.

Cerebral and poetic, *My Mother's Secret*, defines challenges of the human spirit during times of chaos and crisis. Franciszka Halamajowa, residing in the town of Solek, Poland, during WW II, abandoned the risks that if caught, would mean certain death for her and her family. J.L. Witterick based the Holocaust novel on Halamajowa's true story. The author implements the style of short, uncomplicated pages hosting an abundance of profound passages. Witterick elaborates on the depth of both human kindness and evil in desperate conditions. *My Mother's Secret*, is his first novel. Franciszka Halamajowa and her daughter, Helena, are honored in Israel as the Righteous Among Gentiles. The book offers a short synopsis of Franciszka Halamajowa, and a photograph of the plaque which honors both her and her daughter. Poignant and lucid, Witterick's novel stands among the best of Holocaust works.

I enjoyed this story based on actual happenings. God bless the real mother and daughter for their willingness and cunning in hiding Jews and even a German soldier wanting to escape the horrors he saw himself. Although the author took liberty in describing the lives of the families who were hidden, it was done in such a way that you could relate to them and feel their confusion and hopelessness at what was happening around them. Very good read!

With simple prose, J.L. Witterick has written a stunning novel of bravery and sacrifice during World

War II. Franciszka is a Polish cook with two children married to a brutal Ukrainian seduced by Hitler's promise of prosperity. She leaves him to move back to Poland to live with her children, selling eggs to the locals. Like a diary, we watch the horror of the war unfold and new characters are introduced. There is a poor Jewish family, a wealthy Jewish doctor and his family as well as a war weary German soldier. All their stories intersect, their destinies knitted together as their lives are saved by the courage of a Franciszka and her daughter Helena. This is a book that teaches us that heroes come in all sizes from heartbreakingly thoughtful children, to women who willing to sacrifice their futures as well as their very lives, to stay true their values. A quick but intense read, this book captures the spirit of "Righteous among the Nations" and is a testimony to their courage. J.L. Witterrick is a master of understatement, with a deft hand on knowing that her spare, but intense chapters tell a profound story of the human spirit. Well done!

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