

Among the Reeds: The true Story of how a Family survived the Holocaust

Tammy Bottner

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During the dark days of the Holocaust, a Jewish family struggles to survive.

When her son was born, Tammy Bottner experienced flashbacks of being hunted by the Nazis. The strange thing is, these experiences didn't happen to her. They happened to her grandmother decades earlier and thousands of miles away.

Back in Belgium, Grandma Melly made unthinkable choices in order to save her family during WWII, including sending her two-year-old son, Bottner's father, into hiding in a lonely Belgian convent. Did the trauma that Tammy Bottner's predecessors experience affect their DNA? Did she inherit the "memories" of the war-time trauma in her very genes?

In this moving family memoir, told partly from Melly's perspective, the author, a physician, recounts the saga of her family's experiences during the Holocaust. This tale, part history, part scientific reflection on epigenetics, takes the reader on a journey that may read like a novel but is all the more fascinating for being true.

Among the Reeds: The true Story of how a Family survived the Holocaust Details


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Carol Monteverde Monteverde says

A book everyone should read.

I'm so glad to have read this book! I will never forget the Bottner family, and the way the author went into such detail. I felt at times that I was right there with all of them, going through what they went through. How each character is brought to life, I feel as if I got to know them personally.

Risa Batt says

Tender, poignant, and horrifying rendition of the author's father and family experience through the evil events of the German occupation of Brussels. The intriguing concept of epigenetics is fascinating. Could not put this down! Thank you Dr Bottner! What an intimate history lesson!

Anina Butler says

Very poignant story of a family and how they got through WWII.

Mickenzie Jensen says

A very interesting concept paired with a moving story of survival

I enjoyed the story of this family's survival and found the strength, courage, and determination of the young parents truly moving. Though I must admit to finding much of Melly's behavior baffling and, at times, almost irritating, I couldn't help but admire her in a lot of ways. What her and her husband must have gone through during their separation from their children is unimaginable. Yet they cared only that their children would be safe, that they would survive. I was also impressed with the fact that no attempt at hiding the shortcomings of these parents was made. The author never tried to cover up the fact that, though they loved their children beyond words, they were not perfect.

I also must commend the author on the way she explained the fascinating theory of a sort of genetic transference. Normally, I don't even attempt to read through scientific explanations of any sort as they are just too long winded and dull. Her explanation, however, was both concise and interesting. A very intriguing concept!

Susan says

Knowing

It's incredible what these families had to go through. No one knew. There are no points disliked. This is a well written book.

Lucy Meeker says

Unless you have a heart of stone, you could not help but be moved by the subject of this book. Tales of bravery against harrowing atrocities, you almost cannot believe it, and then you remember that this actually happened. I would encourage you to read this book if you aim to learn more about this dark period of our history and are looking for a different perspective than that of Anne Frank's. However, I would absolutely urge you to read Anne's diary at all costs. Highly recommended for anyone interested in holocaust literature.

Velma Demaray says

Riveting

We must never forget. Ms. Bottner's story brings the human part of the story to reality. Putting ourselves in the situation, overwhelms us.

Shrink says

This is an exquisitely written book which describes the unthinkable challenges faced by the author's family during the time of the Holocaust. The story is primarily set in Belgium but follows the characters to many other settings as well. One feels present as the characters struggle to survive the attempted genocide of all Jews during World War II. The loss of life and lack of humanity, as well as the damage to the Jewish culture, and near success of the Hitler regime is astonishing and shameful. Through sheer force of will, luck, perseverance, and love; however several of the author's relatives survive. Dr. Bottner graces us with an intimate portrait of her family, including sharp insights into the continued effects of trauma, which is passed on to the following generations. A beautiful and insightful true story.... strongly recommend!!!!

Georgie Mac says

Heartbreaking decisions forced upon ppl faced with imprisonment and death during WWII

What would you do when your home is being overrun by the Nazi regime? What would you do to protect your children against almost certain death? What desperate acts would you do to ensure your babies had food? How far would you go to avoid capture?

Tammy Bottner goes back through her family's stories, the historical archives, and pieces together the horror of life in Europe during the invasion of Nazi Germany. She explains to heart aches of losing your family, giving up your home life, your professional, your belongings, and all you hold dear as her extended family members were driven out of their home lands. Hitler didn't just want their rights and proceeded removed, he wanted to erase their existence. Those that couldn't believe the dangers found themselves driven across countries to Poland's labor and death camps.

A small percentage of Jewish people fought for their survival in various ways. Ms. Bottner's family were not deceived by false promises and had strong survival instincts. This book shares the stories of how they made it through the war, the occupations, the dangers of discovery, and the camps.

The book concludes with a discussion of genetics and the impact on DNA when individuals are stressed with every conceivable and many incredible stressors on the human specimen.

It makes you think about the Nazi regime and the removal of rights and freedoms of members of their society. It leaves you wondering how did these rules or laws get so out of control and what should have been the stopping point? Horrifically sad.

David Friedman says

Excellent holocaust memoir

Fast moving true account of the horror of the holocaust. Stories of fear and desperation came vividly to life with every page turn.

Mary Sue Wilson says

Enlightening

I enjoy reading about WWII. This is the first survivor's story I have read which tells about hidden children. This book is well written. A true story that will keep the reader engrossed.

Patricia Davis says

In this heart wrenching, true story, Bottner successfully transports the reader to war torn Europe as we follow the plight of a remarkable family in a remarkable time. Alternating between first person narrative of her grandmother, Melly, and third person narrative for all other characters, historical background, and her own reflections, Bottner is able to make this story intimate and compelling, at the same informing the reader of the enormity of the atrocities committed against Jews in early and mid 20th century Europe. This is an important literary work - a story which needed to be told and remembered.

Scott Calhoun says

An book that will truly touch your heart

The reader might think "yet another book about the Holocaust", however this book is most certainly worth reading. The idea of epigenetics is fascinating & the author explains this phenomenon in easy to understand language.

Following this family's unique journey to & from Israel is often heartbreaking; the mental & emotional anguish is monumental. Well written - thank you Tammy for sharing this story.

Glenn says

A Must Read

Incredible story and extremely well written.

This book puts you in the heart of the Holocaust, reminding you of the brutality and the bravery.

I'm consumed with learning more about this time period and this book took me there in a way I haven't felt before.

Thanks to Tammy Bottner for sharing her Family's story.

Pam says

Among the Reeds: The True Story of How a Family Survived the Holocaust is by Tammy Bottner. Tammy tells the story of her Grandparents and her Father as they managed to survive the Holocaust. She took the stories her Grandmother had told her, her Father's stories, stories of other relatives, and research on the places mentioned in the stories and created their story. It is a painful story to read because of the Holocaust, of course, but also because of the unhappiness of her Grandmother throughout her life. It definitely shows the culture of Jewish life before the war and how customs conspired against Melly.

Melly was born to Polish Jews who were trying to find a more peaceful place to live. They were on their way to Germany when Melly made her appearance on September 30, 1921. Since she was born in Leignitz, Germany, she became a German citizen at birth. Melly's Father was greatly disappointed that she was a girl and this set the tone for their relationship. Melly was also born a pessimist. She was sad and unhappy for most of her life. Having a Father that took his disappointment out on her and treated her like both a son and daughter didn't help. Melly took some of her anger out on her sister Inge through incessant teasing. When her brother Nathan was born, she was both relieved and resentful of how her Father fawned over Nathan. Eventually, her Father left the family and went to Holland intending to send for them. Her Mother had to find a way to raise the three children by herself with no income. From a privileged childhood to one of poverty was a huge move for Melly. Melly finally moved across the street from her Mother to give herself some space. However, the owner came to her room and attempted to rape her. Melly got away and went home. Soon after that, her Mother informed Melly that she was to be married. Melly was married to a peasant from Galacia and her life really changed. Genek was entranced by Melly but the marriage was not based on love. However, they stayed together through the Holocaust and the many moves they made in their life afterwards. They eventually moved to Brussels, Belgium where they lived during the Holocaust. They lived as non-Jews in the open. To keep their beloved son safe, they placed him with the Jewish Resistance who in turn placed him in a convent. Here bewildered two-year-old Bobby lived in darkness and without affection for two years. He only spoke Yiddish and German and the nuns spoke French. When her daughter, Irene, was born, she too was placed with the Resistance. She was placed in an individual home and her "parents" had no idea she was Jewish.

This book is good and one that should be read. It isn't easy to read; but it is essential. Tammy has managed to make us feel the anguish her Grandparents felt in sending their children off and the pain that resulted when

they returned. The distance between Melly and Irene was never breached. Bobby had problems his entire life due to his placement in the convent. How does a child recover from the feelings of abandonment when he has no idea why he is being sent away? This book really makes you think about how you would react to a situation like this. Could you send your child off with a strange woman and not know where he will be nor how long he will be gone? Did you do the right thing?
