



The Boy: A Holocaust Story

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A cobblestone road. A sunny day. A soldier. A gun. A child, arms high in the air. A moment captured on film. But what is the history behind arguably the most recognizable photograph of the Holocaust? In *The Boy: A Holocaust Story*, the historian Dan Porat unpacks this split second that was immortalized on film and unravels the stories of the individuals—both Jews and Nazis—associated with it.

The Boy presents the stories of three Nazi criminals, ranging in status from SS sergeant to low-ranking SS officer to SS general. It is also the story of two Jewish victims, a teenage girl and a young boy, who encounter these Nazis in Warsaw in the spring of 1943. The book is remarkable in its scope, picking up the lives of these participants in the years preceding World War I and following them to their deaths. One of the Nazis managed to stay at large for twenty-two years. One of the survivors lived long enough to lose a son in the Yom Kippur War. Nearly sixty photographs dispersed throughout help narrate these five lives. And, in keeping with the emotional immediacy of those photographs, Porat has deliberately used a narrative style that, drawing upon extensive research, experience, and oral interviews, places the reader in the middle of unfolding events.

The Boy: A Holocaust Story Details

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Author : Dan Porat

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Cassandra says

Like another reviewer, I think the title is a bit misleading. The book isn't really about The Boy, but about one Jewish woman and several SS officers. Some of the details were horrific. However, I felt like the book was rather dry. Yes, I cried. But the facts were presented as more of a list than a story. The author tried to fill in details when presented with holes in the historical accounts but it is not clear what exactly was fiction and what was fact.

I don't know how to review this book. I guess that's all I can say.

Daniel Meek says

This fascinating novel keeps the reader on the edge of their seat from beginning to end. As a World War II fanatic, I was intrigued by this book the moment I started reading it. It gave me a different perspective on the terrifying journeys taken by Jews during the era of religious persecution. I felt that this book well demonstrated the terrors of World War II. Porat did a outstanding job writing this story from different viewpoints. Having been told from different views, the story allows the reader to have different insight on the opinions of people.

The cover of the book shows a photograph of a young jewish boy taken by Jurgen Stroop. Stroop was a Nazi officer at the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. His assignment was to photograph the torture and events occurring in Warsaw for his commanding officer Heinrich Himmler. This story focuses on two Jewish victims, a teenage girl and a young boy, who encounter these Nazis in Warsaw in the Spring of 1943. The lives and experiences of Tsvi Nussbaum and Rivkah Trapkovits are told in parallel throughout the book. Tsvi and Rivkah don't know each other, and don't come into contact with each other during the story, but the reader sees that they are having the same experiences living in the Ghetto. They are both terrified of the chaos that surrounds them. They both had to leave their homes and were relocated to the ghetto. This inspirational Historical Non-Fiction story has over 60 photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto before and after its liquidation. After being stationed at the Warsaw Ghetto, Josef Stroop, (who later becomes Jurgen Stroop) Franz Conrad, and Josef Blösche are convicted of mass murder in Nuremberg, Germany.

I could connect with this historical fiction story. Having read other Holocaust related books, this one definitely stood out of the others. By presenting two intertwined stories with two protagonists -- a teenaged girl and a younger boy -- the reader can choose to identify with both protagonists, or with just one. I felt a deeper connection between with Rivkah Trapkovits. Rivkah being a teenager I knew she would be the perfect person to connect with. Rivkah befriends people after escaping a concentration camp. I as well try to make friends with people who look like they need one. Rivkah and I have much in common.

Monica says

“The Boy” is much more a historical novel than it is historical non-fiction. I say this simply because, though filled with a lot of historical information that seems well documented, the author takes a lot of liberty in

presenting personal character narratives that may or may not be accurate. We can well understand the fear and terror that enveloped so many people during that time but unless actual thoughts and words are coming from the diary of someone the author has written about, we can never be sure of what was actually going through their mind.

Having said that, this book is haunting and can only be read with a lot of sadness over what happened in the Warsaw Ghetto. The evil that overtook a few men and affected thousands is overwhelming and incomprehensible to most of us. I continue to read about the events and impacts of the Holocaust only because these are events that can't be forgotten. We can't just turn a cheek and relegate what happened to the past. Memory. It needs to be remembered.

Though certainly not the best book I've read about the Holocaust, "The Boy" is interesting, well written, and thought provoking. The accompanying photographs throughout the book bring a lot of reality and humanity to the book and left me with a haunting feeling that is hard to shake off.

John says

The book is based around an iconic photo of a group of Jews being rounded up by the Nazis in Warsaw. The story follows three Nazis, the boy and a couple of young Jewish people, breaking down their lives into 1913-1938, 1939-1945, and 1945-1982. It is not a terribly in depth book, being only just over 200 pages, but the stories of evading capture and escapes are very exciting. Lot of accompanying photographs are a bonus too.

Shawn says

I will have to join other reviewers in calling the title of this book a bit of a cheat. It is only about the boy in the photo in an abstract way; the bulk of the book deals with the lives of people on both sides of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. On one hand, we follow the experiences of a Jewish woman who survived the ghetto and narrowly escaped ending up in Treblinka. On the other hand is Jürgen Stroop, who oversaw the liquidation of the ghetto, and Josef Blösche, one of the soldiers in the iconic photo. As a Holocaust story it is suitably riveting and depressing. Although I was disappointed that it did not deal more with the boy in the photo, I found some interesting nuggets of information, namely Blösche's biographical information (I knew the Jews of the ghetto nicknamed him "Frankenstein" but didn't know much about why), and the tip that helped the Allies recover Eva Braun's photo albums and other effects.

The author also includes a chapter on the misleading nature of photographs and their misleading depiction of reality, which I felt was his attempt to write himself out of the hole the title of the book created.

Mathieu Dehoorne says

This title is very general but the story is very interesting. The photo on the cover is a memorable photo from the Holocaust. The story takes place during WWII while three people are in a Warsaw ghetto. It tells the story of a teenage boy and girl who encounter Nazis in Warsaw. The Five lives of the victims were very well described. I was wanting to know more about the conditions and way of life they lived especially in Europe during that time. To hear the people's stories and struggles was special. Some of the pictures of Jewish

victims were difficult to look at because of how sad they were. I felt like the book was rather dry. Though certainly not the best book I've read about the Holocaust, but the author did a good job interviewing I can imagine. In the beginning the author talks about why he wanted to write this book which was not very interesting to read. Also flashes back on some of the main characters and how they felt about killing Jews. In the middle of the book he introduces the victims. **SPOILER ALERT!** They were sent to a death camp. Someone managed to escape and traveled all over Europe till the war was over. Most of the victims were Jewish but some were also communists. I came up with a theme for this book "life is worth everything." I wish this book had more interesting moments so I would not want to put the book down. I liked how it talked about the Holocaust from a 1st person point of view which is what I like to look for when I read a book. Overall the book was a good read. It was very interesting to hear all the amazing stories, and that is why I gave it four stars.

Meaghan says

The photo on the cover of this book is probably the most recognizable Holocaust photo in the world, and arguably one of the most recognizable photos in history. The child's terrified little face has captivated many people, not the least author Dan Porat, who became obsessed with uncovering the identities of the people in the picture and the stories of their lives.

I had heard that the boy lived: that he survived the war, became a doctor in Boston, and had that picture framed and on display in his office. The day before I started *The Boy*, I showed the book and its photo to a man I knew and told him what I'd heard. Then I read the book and had to come back to my acquaintance to say, "Um, yeah, I was wrong. There's a doctor in Massachusetts who thought he was the boy, but he almost certainly was not. The photo was taken in the Warsaw Ghetto, see, and he was never in the Warsaw Ghetto. Also, he remembers the picture being taken in July, and the picture shows people wearing heavy coats. This boy in the picture was probably killed." Porat was never able to determine who he was, only who he was not.

"I liked the first story better," my acquaintance replied sadly.

So did I.

But this book has much more to offer than mere soul-crushing mythbusting. The author covers the life of Zvi Nussbaum -- the young Holocaust survivor who thought he was The Boy -- as well as the lives of the two Nazis standing in the background of the photo AND the Nazi holding the camera. (All three were captured and executed after the war, one of them more than two decades later.) I admire the author's research and his ability to put us right there in these people's lives, in the blood and tragedy and chaos.

If only The Boy had lived.

Arianna says

I had a difficult time reading this book. Not due to content but the flow. The whole book seemed off in flow. I have seen the photo of The Boy many times in my life and have always been interested in what had happened to him. I'm happy for the opportunity Mr. Porat gave to delve deeper into the subject however his writing style is not for me.

Connor G. says

"The Boy: A Holocaust Story" by Dan Porat provides an in-depth look into the harsh holocaust times in Germany. Through authentic language, photos, and Porat's imagination, it book is very informational yet intriguing. There is a continuing theme of hope, redemption, and love that is portrayed through the book. The documentation of the hard times and struggles of those in Germany during the time triggered me, as the reader, to be constantly hoping for solutions to their many problems. Perhaps, the thing that inspired me the most throughout the reading process, was the fact the story was inspired by a single photograph. The photograph (as depicted on the front cover) is perhaps the most well known symbol of Holocaust. It was great reading the story, knowing that it was more than just a fictional novel. However, there was one downfall. The frequent use of authentic German, provided a difficult time in understanding the book. Not having any previous German knowledge, having to stop and look up certain words or phrases in order to understand the plot was distracting at times. I feel even that though the use of German was needed to keep the authentic feel intact, it often took that feeling away and broke up the understanding of the true meaning. Overall, it was a fantastic read and I would recommend it to any historical fiction lover.

Chris says

This is an interesting book, but the title is somewhat misleading, or at least the jacket description is misleading.

The book is mostly concerned with tracing three people who were in the Warsaw Ghetto during the uprising. One Jewish woman and two Nazis. Porat does a good job of showing the history.

The only reason why I am giving it three stars is my personal bias against the use of imagination in history. I don't like it. But it is my hang up, not Mr. Porat's.

The book is worth reading simply for the story of the woman who is brave enough to jump out of a transport train.

Christopher Louis says

Not exactly the story I was anticipating, but still a worthwhile account and investigation into the lives of several Jewish residents of the Warsaw Ghetto and some of the Nazi officers who worked to liquidate it.

Judy Chessin says

I was interested in the story of the people, but didn't feel that the boy "story" was tied together. Also, PLEASE label the pictures.

Patricia O'Sullivan says

Of all the photos taken of the Holocaust, none was more haunting to historian Dan Porat than one taken by a Nazi photographer during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. At the center of the photo is a young boy with his hands raised in surrender. Nazi officers stand behind the boy. On the other side of the boy is a group of people also with their hands in the air. Professor Porat kept seeing the photo at Holocaust museums and heard from several curators how the young boy in the photo survived and settled in New York after the war. It is a good story, but Professor Porat wanted to know more.

In writing *The Boy*, Professor Porat relied primarily on research and explains that he filled in gaps in the story by drawing on “*a priori* imagination” rather than speculation. It is an interesting approach to history, but makes the book difficult to categorize. *The Boy* consists of the five overlapping stories of three Nazi officers and two Warsaw ghetto inhabitants. The individual stories are compelling and seek to explain how each person got to the moment in the photo and what happened after the photo was taken. However, Professor Porat maintains the most important question is not what happened? but rather, “how one set of men saw in that photograph heroic soldiers combating humanity’s dregs while the vast majority of mankind sees here the gross inhumanity of man.”

Mark says

A superbly written and moving account of the background of one of the most iconic war photos of all time. The suffering of the Jewish people described is difficult to read and the horror of the Holocaust does not diminish no matter how many accounts of it are read.

Jennifer says

The boy?? It should have been titled "the girl in the picture", because the boy has nothing to do with it until the very end when someone thinks they are the boy in the picture, that they could be, may be, but ultimately they aren't.

The book follows the life of the girl-the most interesting of which is when she escapes the train to the concentration camp-and another boy, not the one in the picture. What is the point?

This could have been a very good book if it had been written about what it was supposed to be about. Very disappointing. And the made up conversations were deceptive. He doesn't say until the end that it was the 'style' of writing. Basically historical fiction. Thumbs down.
