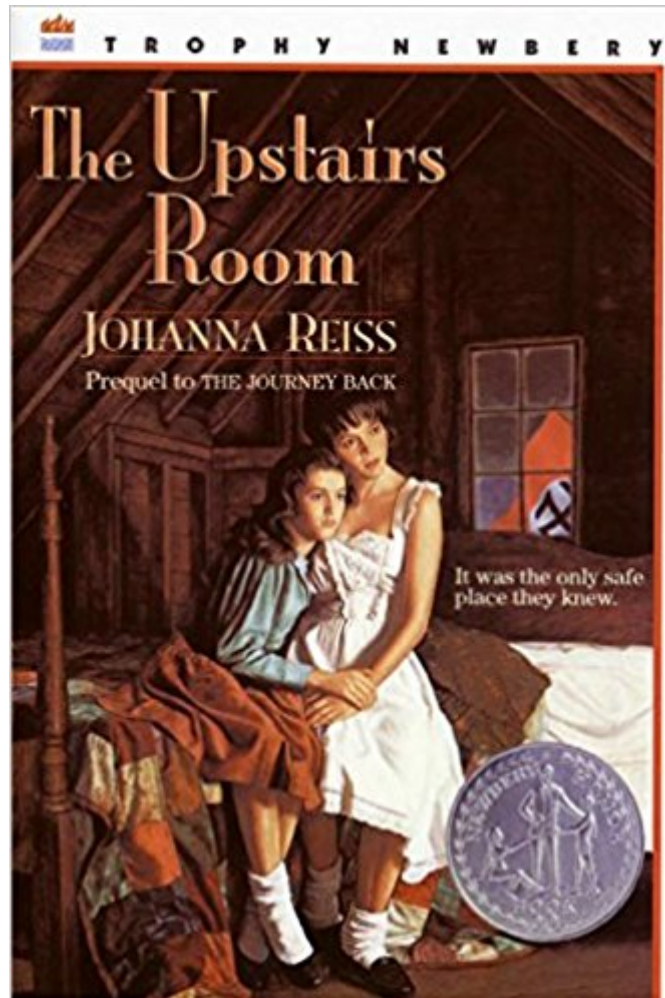




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The Upstairs Room (Trophy Newbery)



Synopsis

A Life in Hiding When the German army occupied Holland, Annie de Leeuw was eight years old. Because she was Jewish, the occupation put her in grave danger-she knew that to stay alive she would have to hide. Fortunately, a Gentile family, the Oostervelds, offered to help. For two years they hid Annie and her sister, Sini, in the cramped upstairs room of their farmhouse. Most people thought the war wouldn't last long. But for Annie and Sini -- separated from their family and confined to one tiny room -- the war seemed to go on forever. In the part of the marketplace where flowers had been sold twice a week-tulips in the spring, roses in the summer--stood German tanks and German soldiers. Annie de Leeuw was eight years old in 1940 when the Germans attacked Holland and marched into the town of Winterswijk where she lived. Annie was ten when, because she was Jewish and in great danger of being captured by the invaders, she and her sister Sini had to leave their father, mother, and older sister Rachel to go into hiding in the upstairs room of a remote farmhouse. Johanna de Leeuw Reiss has written a remarkably fresh and moving account of her own experiences as a young girl during World War II. Like many adults she was innocent of the German plans for Jews, and she might have gone to a labor camp as scores of families did. "It won't be for long and the Germans have told us we'll be treated well," those families said. "What can happen?" They did not know, and they could not imagine.... But millions of Jews found out. Mrs. Reiss's picture of the Oosterveld family with whom she lived, and of Annie and Sini, reflects a deep spirit of optimism, a faith in the ingenuity, backbone, and even humor with which ordinary human beings meet extraordinary challenges. In the steady, matter-of-fact, day-by-day courage they all showed lies a profound strength that transcends the horrors of the long and frightening war. Here is a memorable book, one that will be read and reread for years to come.

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 8 and up

Customer Reviews

In this Newbery Honor book, Reiss writes a stirring, fictionalized account of her own experiences as a Jewish girl during World War II. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"In this fine autobiographical novel, Johanna Reiss depicts the trials of her Dutch-Jewish family during World War II. . . . The youngest of three daughters tells how she and her sister hid for more than two years in the upstairs room of the peasant Oosterveld family. . . . Offers believable characterizations of unremarkable people who survived, if not thrived, and displayed an adaptability and generosity probably beyond their own expectations."-- "SLJ."

A book from my childhood, now shared with my daughters. We bought several copies to give away as gifts as well. For readers 9 and up. We will give our copies to sister families, families of Dutch descent, (the sheltering family is strict Dutch Christian) and Jewish friends. Very good for exploring the sister relationship and what it means to grow up under truly challenging circumstances. I loved this book when I was young. So did my 10 year-old daughter when she read it just recently. Her 8-year-old sister still finds anything about the Holocaust too upsetting even though both sisters survive the German occupation in this book. Still, when the time is right it will be easier to start her WWII education with this book than with Anne Frank's deeply sad story.

Another true account told in first person by the young protagonist. This account, however, unlike *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, does not delve into the atrocities that are committed, but more concerns itself with how the protagonist deals with having to stay in hiding for years in a small room; her thoughts, feelings, observations, and relationships with family, friends, and strangers, and with betrayal from people who she thought dear to her. This may be one account that could be shared with young ones, but sensitively. The protagonist's strength of spirit and faith in people and the world shown in the day-in and day-out boring existence she must resolve herself to, shows how

courage and love can transcend, though not erase, even the horrors of war. The book reads like a fiction novel and is sure to catch the hearts of many readers. Warning, some language may offend some readers.

The Upstairs Room is the true story of a child who was hidden from the Nazis in a room for two years by a family who understood that discovery of their deed would lead to their certain death. This young child had to remain quiet and subdue her normal impulses to run and play or even to just be outdoors on a beautiful day! She also withstood the misery of not having enough to eat or clothes to wear during frigid cold winters. But it is not a dark and dreary tale, because she found beauty and goodness in her surroundings as only a child could. Ms. Reiss created a heartwarming book, with such honesty and openness. We might see so much through the eyes of a child, beginning with gratitude for all that we take for granted.

I had no idea that this was a true story until the end. It made the book more meaningful to me and I intend to read the sequel. Ms. Reiss' experiences brought to life the horrors of the holocaust and put a new thought on what it must have been like to be Jewish in the 1940s. Well written and highly recommended.

"The Upstairs Room" is an excellent read. Told from the perspective of a young girl, this should be required reading for children of a similar age. The story introduces the Holocaust in a way that young readers may especially be able to relate to. The protagonist, being only a child, has little understanding of the real dangers of the situation. Having forced to live through gradually worsening conditions, Anne and her sister start to get restless and reckless, especially when German soldiers move into the home they are hiding in. As an adult reader, I found it to be a bit simplistic, however, the author's original intended audience was her own children, so I can not find fault with this. Older readers may especially find the humanity in the supporting characters of this story to be inspiring. In addition to a tale based on the first hand account of the author, this account also reveals the courage of the family that originally took in the girls, the constant fears of the family that gambled with their own lives to keep the girls hidden, the stupid risks taken by all for what might be a frivolous desire, the scary consequences of that choice, and the pride of these "simple farmers". I especially liked the end of the story.

My daughter had to choose a summer reading book and I am so glad she chose The Upstairs

Room! She has struggled with reading in the past but I could tell that she loved this book because she would give me every detail about what she read. I decided to read it for myself because she was so into it. It was a great story and we both learned a lot from it. When we finished it, I immediately purchased the sequel, *The Journey Back*, which I read in almost one day and she began reading immediately too. It is a true story and we were so drawn to Annie, her sisters, and of course the amazing Oosterveld family that saved her. These are definitely two books we will both always remember! I'm so glad we got the /Kindle versions so we could see the pictures at the end along with the interactive maps of the houses she once lived in and how they look today. I also visited the author's website at JohannaReiss.com and we were able to send her a message and tell her how much we enjoyed her story and these books. We Loved these books and will definitely recommend them to anyone, young and old. I'm sure they will touch your heart as they did ours!

I read this book many, many, years, ago (1975) when I was young and it moved me so much I never forgot the story or the book. My son needed a book to read for school and I felt this would be a good one for him, even though it is about girls. He is very interested in the events surrounding World War II and likes to read fiction and non-fiction about it. He read this book and it was also very emotional for him. The fact that the family did not realize the scope of the war, or how horrific it really was hit home with him. The frustration and depression of the girls was understood by a 12 year old boy (going on 40) and the fact that the Gentile family put their lives at risk to hide the girls really enforced the idea that it is sometimes difficult to do the right thing, but you do what is right no matter. He thinks this is a book that will stay with him, too. It stayed with me (I remembered the name of after all those years, and the story line) and I cannot say enough about it.

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