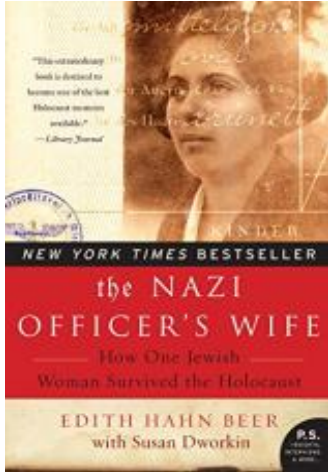


The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust

Edith Hahn Beer with Susan Dworkin



About the Book

Edith Hahn was an outspoken young woman in Vienna when the Gestapo forced her into a ghetto and then into a slave labor camp. When she returned home months later, she knew she would become a hunted woman and went underground. With the help of a Christian friend, she emerged in Munich as Grete Denner. There she met Werner Vetter, a Nazi Party member who fell in love with her. Despite Edith's protests and even her eventual confession that she was Jewish, he married her and kept her identity a secret.

In wrenching detail, Edith recalls a life of constant, almost paralyzing fear. She tells how German officials casually questioned the lineage of her parents; how during childbirth she refused all painkillers, afraid that in an altered state of mind she might reveal something of her past; and how, after her husband was captured by the Soviets, she was bombed out of her house and had to hide while drunken Russian soldiers raped women on the street.

Despite the risk it posed to her life, Edith created a remarkable record of survival. She saved every document, as well as photographs she took inside labor camps. Now part of the permanent collection at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., these hundreds of documents, several of which are included in this volume, form the fabric of a gripping new chapter in the history of the Holocaust --- complex, troubling, and ultimately triumphant.

Discussion Guide

1. THE NAZI OFFICER'S WIFE opens with the story of a nurse smuggling an onion in to the hospital to feed to an enemy soldier. Throughout the memoir, Beer recounts how men and women like this put their lives in jeopardy through their work to help others. Where do you think this nurse and others, like Christl Denner, who gave Edith her identification papers, got the courage to take such risks?
2. While working as a nurse for the Red Cross, Edith's vocabulary threatened to reveal her true identity as an educated Austrian woman. How did Edith's intelligence and education help her in the time of war? How did it become a burden?
3. Edith's two lovers --- Pepi and Werner --- played very different roles in the war. Compare the two men and discuss how each contributed to Edith's life. Which helped her the most?
4. Although it was illegal, Edith used Werner's radio to tune in to the BBC broadcasts. What does the radio come to represent for the couple? How did restricted news contribute to the Nazis attempt to control the population?
5. Given Werner's party loyalties as well as his flash temper, what was Edith jeopardizing by telling him that she was Jewish? Why didn't Werner turn Edith in to the authorities?
6. After Edith's mother was deported to Poland, she never saw her daughter again. Should Edith have come out of hiding with Werner in Germany and instead risked her life to travel to Poland in search of her mother?
7. Throughout her time at Osterburg, Edith corresponded with her mother, Pepi, and her friends from home. What significance did this communication with the outside world have for Edith and the other girls who worked at the plantation?
8. Edith recalls that when she was growing up, her family did not strictly follow Jewish religious tradition. What role did her faith have in her will to survive in Nazi Germany?
9. In 1946, Edith visited a transit camp and a group of Jewish survivors berated her after learning that she married a German soldier. Do you think that these men were justified in their actions? How did their view of German soldiers differ from Edith's?
10. Under the influence of anesthesia during childbirth, many women confessed illegal activities that could have led to extreme punishment by Nazi officials. Were you surprised that many of Edith's neighbors were hiding secrets of their own? What role did fear play in the context of Nazi Germany. What role did trust play?
11. Why was Werner so upset about having a girl? Was he afraid she would have a handicap like his first child?
12. Did you believe that Edith loved Werner? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Born in Vienna in 1914, Edith Hahn Beer, currently resides in Netanya, Israel. She and Werner Vetter divorced in 1947. Her daughter, Angela, lives in London and is believed to be the only Jew born in a Reich hospital in 1944.

Critical Praise

?In a well-written narrative that reads like a novel, she relates the escalating fear and humiliating indignities she and others endured, as well as the anti-Semitism of friends and neighbors...Her story is important both as a personal testament and as an inspiring example of example of perseverance in the face of terrible adversity.?

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