



Let Me Whisper You My Story

by Moya Simons

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Book description

From the author of *Hello God* comes a moving story about the impact of war on ordinary people.

Rachel is German and Jewish and living in Leipzig, Germany. Life is good, and revolves around Sabbath meals shared with her happy family. With the outbreak of World War II, their lives are changed. The family are forced to move from their comfortable home into cramped housing, and when the Nazis arrive to finally take the family away they don't know what is to become of them.

But Rachel's father gives her instructions that save her life. He also tells her not to speak. Rachel remains quiet for the rest of the war, but what happened to her family? Will Rachel regain her voice now that she really needs it?

Ages: 9 – 13

About the author

Moya Simons has been writing for children for over fifteen years. She has been shortlisted in the Young Australian Best Book Awards three times, and also in the

West Australian Young Readers Book Awards. Her books have been published in the USA, UK, Italy, Holland, Spain, Japan, Taiwan and Germany.

Further information about the author and her books can be found at:

<http://www.moyasimons.com/>

Setting

- Leipzig, Germany
- 'Hartfield', England (Note: this location is partially based on a similar institution in Lingfield – see author's notes)
- Sydney, Australia

Themes

- War
- The Holocaust
- Children's experience of war
- Social injustice
- Genocide
- Human kindness and self-sacrifice
- Immigration and diaspora
- Orphans
- Memories, family history
- Hope and survival

Characters

Rachel Schwarz (narrator)

Miri (Rachel's sister)

Rachel's Mama and Papa

Erich and Agnes (Rachel's cousins)

Uncle Ernst and Aunty Gitta

Mrs Epstein, Jakob, Mrs Liebermann (other residents in the apartment)

Gertrude, Heinrich, Friedrich (the family who concealed Rachel)

Ursula, Peter, Sarah, Martha, Greta, Pierre, Eva, Timothy, Mrs Wetherby, Eva,

Mary, Gabi, Otto, Mrs Feinberg, Isaac (residents of Hartfield House and the

nearby village)

QUESTIONS AFTER READING

Part One

Chapter 1

1. In your own words, describe Rachel's impression of her family and life before the war?
2. What was Rachel's explanation for her doll Annie's lost eye?
3. Which words did Rachel use to describe the feeling that remained after a girl spat on her? Discuss.

Chapter 2

1. How did Rachel gain comfort from her family as signs of hatred towards Jews became apparent?
2. What did Miri say in response to Mama's bleeding hand following the clean up on the night that became known as *Kristallnacht*?
3. What did Rachel notice about her father as the situation worsened for Jews in Germany?
4. Which of Miri's actions prompted Rachel to seek a place she could go to when she needed to feel better?
5. On reflection, what did Rachel understand as the reason for her mother's sudden obsession with cleaning the house?
6. What was the consequence of Germany invading Poland in September 1939?
7. Which significant rule was initiated for all Jews in this chapter?

Chapter 3

1. Which major action was Rachel's family forced to take following an early morning delivery from the Gestapo?
2. How did the family feel upon arrival at their new home?

Chapter 4

1. What was one of the very first things Rachel did after arriving at the new apartment?
2. How did Miri choose to record her daily thoughts?
3. Why did Miri say the family was like 'rats in a trap'?

Chapter 5

1. What changes did Rachel begin to observe in Miri and their cousin Erich?

2. In Rachel's mind, why was Miri initially reluctant to share her scent?
3. Despite being weak from lack of food, why did Rachel want to 'try to keep running.'

Chapter 6

1. What caused the commencement of the weekly food parcel that Mama began to bring home for the family each week?
2. As confessed to his cousin Miri, which thoughts preoccupied Erich?
3. According to people on the street, what led to the Fleischmann's being taken away?

Chapter 7

1. In the scarf Mama was knitting, what did each colour signify?
2. Which family custom had Papa invented in a time when there was no war, no worries, no machine guns, no Nazis and no Hitler?

Chapter 8

1. When the Gestapo took people like Uncle Ernst away, what did those left behind believe had happened to them?
2. In this chapter, what did Miri's diary entry reveal about her version of reality and the action she would like to take as a consequence?
3. Why did Mama fear for Mrs Liebermann when she failed to appear at the usual place and time?
4. Give an opinion on the meaning of Miri's poem about the white bird.

Chapter 9

1. As the Gestapo was taking the families from the *Judenhaus* away, what did Papa instruct Rachel to do?
2. Why do you think the young soldier with the blue eyes ignored seeing Rachel in the cupboard?

Chapter 10

1. What incentive was offered to those who handed Jews over to the Gestapo? And what was the risk if they kept a Jew hidden?
2. Why do you think the couple that found Rachel decided to keep her a secret?
3. Which important item was left behind when Rachel left the apartment?
4. How did Friedrich react to Rachel's arrival at his grandparents' apartment?

Chapter 11

1. Why did Rachel choose not to speak?
2. Which familiar items helped to ease Rachel's fear in her new surroundings?
3. How did Friedrich's attendance at the Hitler Youth meetings influence his self-belief and his understanding of Jews?
4. Why was Gertrude adamant that Friedrich think for himself?
5. What made Gertrude unable to leave Rachel during an air raid and what was her motivation for protecting her?
6. Which shock at school challenged Friedrich's beliefs?

Chapter 12

1. Once she turned ten, what did Rachel decide she wanted to be brave enough to do?
2. Upon her own reflection, why had Rachel entered a silent world and why do you think she was beginning to want to speak?
3. To pass the time, how did Friedrich begin to help Rachel and how did this improve the children's relationship?
4. Despite reduced rations, according to Heinrich, why did Hitler continue to keep feeding the Germans?
5. What did Rachel contemplate after reading the love poem Miri had written about Jakob?
6. What caused Freddy's confusion about the Bible?
7. Why did Freddy suddenly apologise to Rachel after an air raid?
8. How do you interpret the growing understanding between Freddy and Rachel?

Chapter 13

1. Which secret did Freddy and Rachel share?
2. After an accusation from a woman from the upstairs apartment, what reason did Gertrude give her family for her continued determination to conceal Rachel?
3. What reason did Freddy give for concealing Rachel from the Gestapo's visit? Do you think this was the real reason?

Chapter 14

1. Despite wanting to talk, why did Rachel continue not to?
2. Which incident caused Rachel and her adopted family to flee the apartment building and what was another tragic consequence of this?

Part Two

Chapter 15

1. Why did Rachel suddenly decide that she was no longer a child?
2. Despite the devastation and tragedy all around, why were the citizens of Leipzig suddenly receiving food parcels?
3. Why did Freddy question his concept of trust and suddenly declare that he hated war?
4. Why did Gertrude decide to hand Rachel over to the Red Cross and how difficult do you think this would have been for her?
5. How did Rachel feel as she was seated on the Red Cross bus with the other children?

Chapter 16

1. What was a consequence of Rachel's muteness at the Red Cross home?
2. Which incident reminded Rachel of her good fortune at having been taken in by Gertrude and Heinrich?
3. Despite her sense of loss when separated from Gertrude and Freddy, why did Rachel feel a sense of hope at the thought of her relocation to England?

Chapter 17

1. In your own words, write an account of some of the thoughts Rachel experienced as she arrived at Hartfield House.

Chapter 18

1. At Hartfield House, why did Rachel decide it was the time to put aside Miri's journal?
2. Why did Martha and the doctor believe Jacques and Rachel should spend time together?

Chapter 19

1. Which experiences at Hartfield House enabled Rachel to feel like she and the other refugees were children again?
2. How did Rachel initiate the return of Jacques' hearing?
3. What was the first word Rachel spoke upon the return of her voice?

Chapter 20

1. How do you think Greta's make-believe world helped her to cope with her feelings?

2. Which situations made Rachel feel as though she was up for sale?

Chapter 21

1. In relation to language, what was one consequence of the children's war memories?
2. What news regarding her family was delivered to Rachel at Hartfield House?
3. Why did Greta scold Rachel when she appeared glum and withdrawn?

Chapter 22

1. Give your opinion about Rachel's poem about Hatfield House.
2. What reason did Rachel give Tom and Timothy's parents for refusing their kind offer of to adopt her?
3. From his letter to Rachel, describe how Freddy had changed his thinking since the Hitler Youth days?

Chapter 23

1. What sort of impact do you think the visit to London had upon the children from Hartfield House and what were some of the positive and negative outcomes of the trip?

Chapter 24

1. When a letter arrived for Rachel during the winter of 1947, what convinced her that Miri and Papa were alive?

Chapter 25

1. In his letter to Rachel, why did Freddy say he planned to be a teacher?
2. After her discovery in the old oak tree, which repressed memories did Greta share with Rachel and Martha?
3. After revealing the truth to her friend, what exciting news gave Greta hope for the future and helped to buoy her spirits?

Chapter 26

1. Write an account of some of the experiences Rachel and Greta had on board ship as they sailed towards Australia.
2. What exciting family news did a letter from Papa bring to Rachel?
3. How did Freddy's letter to Rachel make her feel?
4. What were some of Rachel's thoughts at her arrival in Sydney and upon seeing her papa and Miri?

Hear me

Discuss the poem and its universal analysis of war.

Timeline

Refer to the timeline at the back of the book and discuss some of the major incidents that led up to and followed the war.

Words from the author

Read and discuss the author's ideas. What do you think might have prompted her to write the book?

ACTIVITIES

- Choose a character from the story and write a diary entry; alternatively, compile a diary to describe your own imagined experience as a child during wartime.
- Think about how an activity such as knitting, and in particular, the creation of an object such as a scarf, can assist people during times of difficulty. Then knit a scarf using the pattern in the links section below or as a class knit 20 cm. squares and join them together to make a class rug for the reading corner.
- Write a poem to illustrate your impression of the novel, your understanding of the Holocaust or one that is inspired by an incident in the story.
- Research a topic of your choice such as Adolf Hitler, the Holocaust, survivors of war, children in war etc. and prepare a report to share with the class.
- Talk about how children were unable to go to school during the war and how Freddy assisted Rachel to learn to read.
- Research a Jewish festival or custom and present an illustrated project of your findings.
- After completing the novel, write a story as a continuation of events, describing Rachel and her family's reunion, Freddy's arrival in Australia etc. Also consider how Papa and Miri came to trace Rachel, what might have happened to Agnes and anything else you imagine might have occurred after their reunion.
- Look at a world map and discuss the locations of the countries involved in World War II.
- A food shortage is a fact of life during wartime. Discuss some of the meals discussed in the novel and imagine what it must be like to go to bed hungry

each night. Follow the link to the Jewish recipe site below and choose and make a Jewish dish to share with the class.

- Visit a Jewish grocer and discuss the different foods that are either familiar or unknown to you.
- Visit the Sydney Jewish Museum, or the Immigration Museum or the Jewish Museum in Melbourne.

Culturally significant words

Research one of the following words and give an explanation of its meaning to the class.

- Pesach
- Haggadah
- Hanukkah
- Sabbath
- Kristallnacht
- Judenhaus
- Passover
- Hora
- Matzo

Miri's journal

- Discuss the many journal entries Miri made.
- What is the purpose of Miri's poetry in the novel? Examples can be found on the following pages: 44-45, 96-97, 100, 142, and 165

Miri's scent

- Despite it being very special to her, why did Miri begin to share her scent with Rachel?
- Discuss and write about the importance of the scent in the novel, especially in relation to the incidents in which it featured such as on the first letter Rachel received after learning Papa and Miri were still alive, and at the Sydney dock?

The World's Longest Scarf

- Why do you think Mama began to knit the scarf?
- Who made Rachel aware of the colour and part of the scarf that was representative of her?
- Why do you think the scarf was so important and such a comfort to Rachel throughout her ordeal?

- How did Papa react when Rachel waved the scarf from the deck of the docking ship at their reunion?

Memory

- Discuss and write about the significance of memory in the story, especially in relation to The World's Longest Scarf, Miri's journal and scent and Rachel's decision to remain mute for so long.

Hope

- Find and discuss the incidents in the novel that reveal particular characters' reasons for being hopeful about the future.
- In times of great hardship, why is hope an important or valuable state of mind?

What if ...

- Discuss the events in the novel that changed the course of a particular person's life. E.g. the German soldier ignoring Rachel as she hid in the cupboard; Gertrude's loss of her own daughter and the resultant dedication she felt to keeping Rachel safe. Find and discuss other examples from the novel.
- Then imagine a different life for Rachel if the kindness of others had not been bestowed upon her.

Quotes for discussion

Discuss the following and find some other significant quotes to share with the class.

- 'You can not take away learning.' Pg. 4
- 'Bad things happen to Jews. Because you belong to me you are a Jewish doll. That's why you lost your eye.' Pg. 5-6
- 'Although I washed my forehead raw, I could still feel this invisible imprint of hate' Pg. 7
- 'I remember my parents' silence ... cloak.' Pg. 12
- 'As long as we were together we could make a home anywhere.' Pg. 31
- 'Knitting your memories?' scoffed Aunty Gitta. 'Knit a blanket, something practical. Memories won't keep us warm.' 'Ah, but they do.' Pg. 58

Other books by the author

- *Hello God*
- *Totally Creepy*

For a more comprehensive list, go to:

<http://www.moyasimons.com/>

Young Adult Fiction - books about war and the Holocaust

- *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry
- *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* by Judith Kerr
- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne
- *Diary of Laura's Twin* by Kathy Kacer
- *Hana's Suitcase* by Karen Levine
- *Parvana* and other books by Deborah Ellis
- *Jameela* by Rukhsana Khan
- *Once, Then and Now* by Morris Gleitzman
- *A Rose for the Anzac Boys* by Jackie French
- *Hitler's Daughter* by Jackie French
- *Soldier on the Hill* by Jackie French
- *The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded* by Jackie French
- *Soldier Boy* by Anthony Hill
- *Young Digger* by Anthony Hill
- *Gallipoli* by Anthony Hill
- *The Diary of Anne Frank*
- *Theodora's Gift* by Ursula Dubosarsky
- *The Night Crossing* by Karen Ackerman
- *When the Siren Wailed* by Noel Streatfeild

Research Links

Author or book related sites

<http://www.anthonyhillbooks.com/home.html>

<http://www.jackiefrench.com/historical.html>

<http://www.annefrank.com/>

World War II

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Leipzig_in_World_War_II

<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/britain.html>

<http://www.shoaheducation.com/civlibtime.html#39>

The Holocaust – a teacher’s guide

<http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/people/children.htm>

Other stories of survival

<http://holocaust-children.tripod.com/>

http://www.adl.org/children_holocaust/children_main1.asp

Scarf knitting project

<http://www.aokcorral.com/how2oct2003.htm>

Immigration & Jewish history

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/>

<http://www.jewishmuseum.com.au/>

Jewish holidays and festivals

<http://www.mazornet.com/holidays/>

Jewish recipes

<http://jewishrecipes.org/>