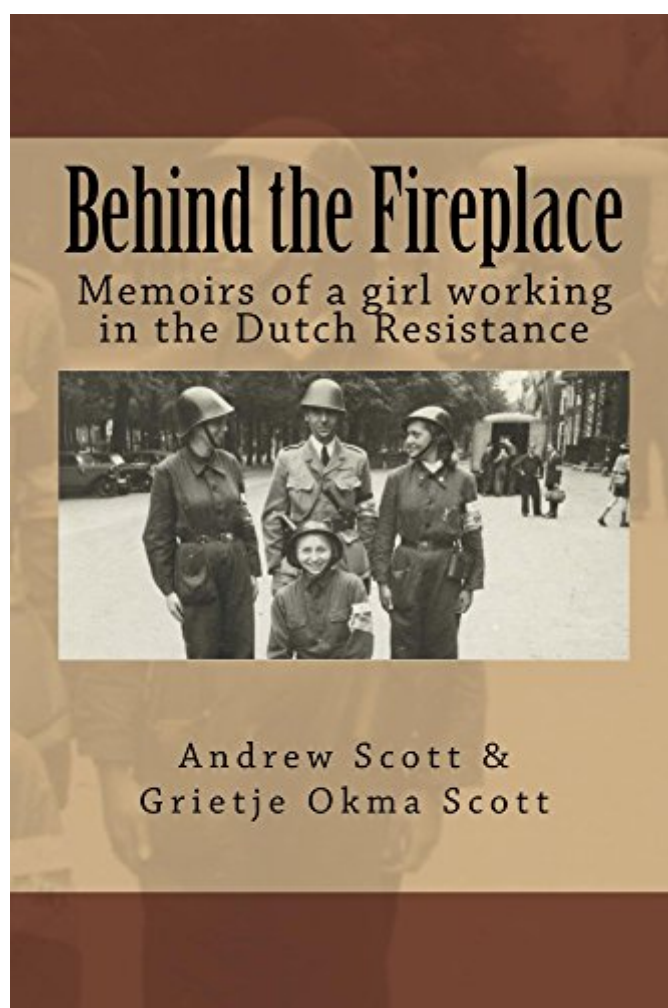


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Behind The Fireplace: Memoirs Of A Girl Working In The Dutch Resistance



Synopsis

As World War 2 progressed, the Okma family took six Jewish refugees into their house, hiding them in a secret room behind their fireplace. The youngest daughter, Kieks, joined the Resistance, delivering illegal newspapers, guiding British parachutists around The Hague and preparing safe houses for Special Forces who were dropped in from England. As the War continued, she fell in love with a Resistance commander, and worked with him to rescue wounded colleagues, steal weapons from German arms dumps and move weapons around the country. They had a tumultuous parting and she continued her work, acting as a courier with a two hundred km bike ride to the north of Holland. When she returned home, she appreciated how much the war had changed her and her boyfriend, and prepared to try a reconciliation. She escaped a firing squad four times, and survived the war, mentally scarred by her experiences. She sought help, but the help she was offered came in a poisoned chalice, and she kept her secret to herself for almost fifty years. Her family in Holland was recognised by Yad Vashem, the Israeli organisation that records those who saved Jews from the Holocaust, and she was awarded a pension for her work in the Resistance by the Dutch foundation Stichting 1940-1945. It was only when these organisations acknowledged the truth of her claims that she had the confidence to tell her family of the events from long ago.

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Customer Reviews

This account of one family doing the right thing in occupied Holland during the war was well-written and totally engaging. I could not help but admire this family who sheltered Jews in their home and worked for the resistance. The book centered around the daughter Kieks, the youngest in the family. She took great risks for her hidden guests and in her resistance work. What bothered me terribly was the lack of gratitude and understanding shown the family by their hidden guests who had the attitude of guests staying in a hotel wanting good service and refusing at times to cooperate with safety rules set by the family to insure everyone was safe. There was by some, the attitude that I will do as I please. (I have read similar accounts along this line in other memoirs and find it deeply disturbing).It got worse after Kieks married and moved to Canada where she developed PTSD and no one believed her account of what went on during the war and her involvement with the resistance and hiding Jews. She was declared mentally ill and subsequently it ended up destroying her marriage. I highly recommend this well-written account.

This book is a autobiographical look at a young girls' experiences surviving the German Invasion and subsequent occupation of Holland during WWII. The writer is excellent in her description of the time, the political and social climate as well as her feelings during this difficult time for her and her family. She also does a great job describing her experiences in the Dutch Underground Resistance and proves to be tough, strong in character and resolve. I read this book very quickly as it was hard to stop reading, it was engrossing. The book was interesting, including many facts and aspects of occupation that I wasn't aware of. I have read other Holocaust survivors books by those who originated in Holland, this was a great book to include in that selection. There are many aspects of this book that are very moving, including her family assisting other Jewish Holocaust survivors, escapes, struggles for food, and ultimately the decision to write this history.

A young persons self sacrifice to save the lives on Jews hiding in her home and with the entire family therefore facing death if they were discovered.They increasingly hid more and more people and had to find the means, at great risk to feed and sustain them. This young woman had to endure sexual degradation to save herself from execution when, while sourcing food, she happened upon a Nazi transport convoy of a secret missile. The other civilians who were caught up in the same net were machine gunned by the Nazi's while she lay hidden in the snow. Having endured these horrors

society treated her with contempt for her actions in saving her own life. Not only was she wrongfully judged by her psychiatrist and husband she had to endure encountering her abuser while on holiday with her family after the war and thwart his attempts to make contact with her. She suffered not only during the war but paid a tragic price for her efforts for the rest of her life. Her redemption and recognition by the State of Israel were a salve that should have come earlier and hopefully have saved her some of her torment

This book is wonderful! I am excited that Kieks was recognized for her work in the resistance and for helping to save those Jewish refugees! I think it is sad that it doesn't seem to me the people they hid truly appreciated the Okma's dedication and everything they did to keep them alive. The one couple each had 14 siblings before the war and they were the only survivors! It was so heartbreaking to read how Kiek's was treated by the psychiatrist and her church in Scotland, when she told about her experiences!

This is a story at once heroic and tragic. It tells the story of young "Kieks" Okma, who at the age of 17 begins a journey with her family through the treacherous, brutally arbitrary, deadly world of the Dutch Resistance and the families who hid the "onderduikers" -- Jews and others being hunted by the Nazi occupiers. It is utterly unsentimental but deeply humane, and, in its frankness, undermines many of the more simplistic portrayals of the era -- that people were either good or bad, either Anne Frank or Adolph Eichmann, that those in hiding were unfailingly grateful to their protectors, that Resistance members were universally feted after the war -- and, most damningly, that women Resistance members' histories were believed rather than ridiculed as something akin to "hysteria." It is at once exhilarating and painful to read, and will leave many with very mixed feelings -- incredible admiration for Kieks and many of her compatriots, frustration with some others whom she helped, anger at the brutal sexism of 1950s psychiatry, appreciation for her son's tenacity and faith which led to the book itself, gratitude that she lived long enough to receive the recognition she richly deserved. I couldn't put it down.

Adds to the written history of WWII and what GOOD people did to counter the BAD. Too bad these were not written a number of years ago before so many have passed away. Makes you think, is history getting ready to repeat itself? Sad state of affairs.

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