



A Nazi Loved Me: The Story of Marguerite Mishkin (A BOOK by ME)

A Book by Me, Maya Baker

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A Nazi Loved Me: The Story of Marguerite Mishkin (A BOOK by ME) A Book by Me, Maya Baker Born Marguerite Lederman to Jewish parents in Brussels, Belgium on May 8, 1941. As a child, Marguerite experienced many difficult changes, the worst of which was being separated from her mother and father. She and her entire family were in danger because of Nazi persecution of the Jews during WWII. Marguerite's family originally came from Poland into Belgium, hoping to escape persecution. When the Nazis took over Belgium in May, 1940, the lives of the Lederman's changed for the worst. On October 31, 1942, Marguerite's father was arrested and taken to Auschwitz concentration camp, where he was murdered less than a month later. In 1943, under the threat of death, Marguerite's mother approached the Belgian resistance movement for help in hiding little Marguerite and her sister. With the help of a local Catholic priest, they were hidden with a rural family. Their mother went into hiding elsewhere. Marguerite and her sister Annette had their names changed and took on new identities. The family with whom they were placed had three older children of their own, so neighbors were told that Marguerite and Annette were their nieces who had come to live with them to get away from the war and to get some fresh air. They all attended Catholic Church, and the two girls went to a Catholic nursery school. Marguerite's new family owned a café that Nazi soldiers frequented, and Marguerite visited often. The soldiers were very kind to Marguerite, not knowing she was Jewish. They let her sit on their laps, take sips from their drinks and puff on their cigarettes. Later, she would throw up. One of the soldiers became particularly fond of Marguerite and brought her gifts of toys and candy. One day, while Marguerite was sitting on his lap, he made the disparaging comment that he "could smell a Jew ten miles away!" While in hiding, their Jewish mother came to visit them whenever she could. She was often in disguise, wearing a babushka (scarf) on her head. Marguerite sadly recalled later that she and her sister usually ignored their mother during these visits because they were angry at her for giving them up to strangers. Of course, they were too young to understand the sacrifices their mother had made and later deeply regretted their treatment of her. Although most of Belgium was liberated by the allies by October, 1944, Marguerite's mother was captured by the Nazis the previous July 31 and taken on the last transport to Auschwitz. Red Cross records show that she was murdered in December, 1944, just a month before the camp was liberated. After the war, Marguerite and her sister were removed from the Catholic family and sent to a Jewish orphanage in Brussels for four years. Then they were placed on a transport headed to Israel with other orphans. But something unique happened when the train was stopped by two Belgian policemen who took both girls from the train. They explained that they had just received word of the girls' adoptions by a couple in the United States. By 1950, Marguerite, nine, and Annette, ten, were living in Chicago with a rabbi and his wife. Neither of the girls could speak English, but fortunately, the couple spoke Yiddish, Marguerite's and Annette's native language. The two girls had a happy life growing up in Chicago. Annette eventually married, had five children and 25 grandchildren. She passed away of cancer about 14 years ago. Marguerite graduated from Roosevelt University and became a teacher. She is now retired, but speaks often to schools, colleges and community groups about her family's experiences during the Holocaust. One of Marguerite's greatest hopes is that young people will "feel good about themselves. If they feel good about themselves," she says, "they won't pick on other people. They won't think they're any better than anyone else, and they're not going to bully others."

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