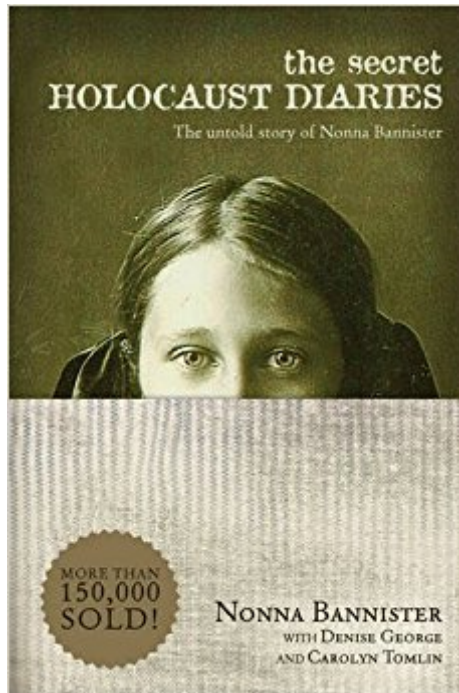




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# The Secret Holocaust Diaries: The Untold Story Of Nonna Bannister



## Synopsis

Nonna Bannister carried a secret almost to her Tennessee grave: the diaries she had kept as a young girl experiencing the horrors of the Holocaust. This book reveals that story. Nonna's childhood writings, revisited in her late adulthood, tell the remarkable tale of how a Russian girl from a family that had known wealth and privilege, then exposed to German labor camps, learned the value of human life and the importance of forgiveness. This story of loss, of love, and of forgiveness is one you will not forget.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Russian refugee Bannister (1927–2004) rarely spoke about her brutal experiences under the regimes of Stalin and Hitler, not even to the American she married after the war. In this memoir, she reveals how a privileged childhood in the 1920s and '30s gave way to horror and loss in the 1940s. Although the sound quality of this production is poor (lots of rustling papers), Rebecca Gallagher does reasonably well with the multiple languages and wisely avoids attempting to replicate European accents. What is irritating, however, is the constant interruption in the form of unnecessary editor's notes, which make the narrative choppy and disjointed. More helpful is the seventh disc, which contains an interview with Bannister's husband and son, a precious audio reminiscence from Nonna herself, recorded in 1993, and abundant PDF materials, including maps, photographs and genealogical data. A Tyndale hardcover. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

How this story came to be written is a big part of the drama. The only World War II survivor of her wealthy Russian, devout Christian family, Nonna Lisowskaya came to the U.S. in 1950, married Henry Bannister, and never spoke about her Holocaust experience until a few years before her death in 2004, when she revealed her diaries, originally written in six languages on paper scraps that she had kept in a pillow strapped to her body throughout the war. Now those diaries, in her English translation, tell her story of fleeing Stalinist Russia, not knowing what was waiting in Hitler's Germany, where she saw her mother murdered in the camps, escaped a massacre of Jews shot into a pit, was nursed by Catholic nuns, and much more. The editors' commentary in different type constantly interrupts the memoir, but the notes are helpful in explaining history and context. The added-on heavy messages celebrating Nonna's Christian forgiveness seem intrusive and unnecessary, no matter how heartfelt.

--Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

This book is basically Nonna's transcription of her diaries from her childhood, mixed in with later memories' and cleaned up by her husband and a couple of editors. I am not sure whether the format is exactly the same in print, but in the Kindle version of the book, I found the editors' interjections in the story to be extremely disruptive and obnoxious, like that one guy at the office who always has to throw in his two cents because he believes he knows more about every subject than anyone else in the room. For example, Nonna talked about her mother painting pictures for a guard and then a few sentences later mentioned Mr. Xxxxx (she actually used a name which I am not remembering at the moment) and how when his paintings were done, something happened. There's a big dividing line and red text calling out "Mr. Xxxxx:" and the editors go on to explain here that when she mentions Mr. Xxxxx, she is probably talking about the guard. Umm, yeah. I guessed as much. And other times when Nonna switched from present tense to past tense, they called out in bright red text the fact that this part here is probably something she wrote later when transcribing the diaries later in life. And when Nonna mentioned something that the Nazis did, the editors interjected to claim the Nazis didn't do that thing. Maybe they didn't in general but how do you know they didn't in this case? GAH! Just stop interrupting!!! Several times the editors' interruptions explained how Nonna had photos of this person or that place, and they exist today. If that is the case, why weren't any of these photos included in the book? Why is every chapter divided by the same photo of... presumably pillow ticking? That being said, if you can forgive the obnoxious editors and just pay attention to Nonna's story, she had some lovely memories of her childhood and her family. And then she survived the

horrors of the holocaust. Basically, the explanation at the front of the book telling me that Nonna wrote her diaries on little scraps of paper throughout her childhood, and then years later translated and added to them made me understand that the writing was from two different times in her life. I did not need to then be reminded of it every time things jumped around. And if the editors' other notes were in the form of tiny footnotes or something, it would have let me have more info if I wanted or needed it without so jarringly disrupting the story.

This is a simply awesome read about how a Russian Immigrant survive the Stalin and Hitler regime --- a tale she held in her heart and didn't even tell any of her family after she arrived to America and married her husband, of 53 years ---- and, managed to live a most wonderful life carrying the happy memories she had of her dead family with her. History repeats itself unless the stories are told and this story is a remarkable telling of a truth people need to face! It brings history to life and throws it in your face!

This is a very good book to read if you are interested in WWII and the holocaust. This is told by a Russian Orthodox girl who with her family fled Russia as WWII was starting. The diaries were not published until after Nonna has passed away, this was her wish. She had kept all of her secrets from her family until her golden years. She then felt it should be told so that this doesn't happen again. She gives a beautiful detailed story of her early childhood in Russia with horse drawn sleighs and a grandma who has a 37 room great house in addition to many cottages. The family is quite wealthy, that being said they were still in danger when Hitler invades Russia. It is never quite known if her father may have been Jewish but he was the one in the most danger. Nonna and her mother go on a voluntary work detail from Russia to Germany to work in factories. What they end up in is cattle cars and going to camps that were work (concentration) camps. They fared only very slightly better than the Jews. All through the book Nonna has a hard time understanding why the Jews are being treated this way. I cannot blame her I still don't get it. Nonna and her mother suffer greatly. There are many different places her family travels to stay alive during the war. It is a non stop page turner. It is mixed with so many fond memories that it makes the hard times not bring you totally down. Don't get me wrong your heart will break for Nonna and all the people who suffered, but you will so enjoy the good memories that Nonna had to carry her through. I highly recommend this book, especially if you have not read much about the holocaust. This would be good for middle school and up. The language is not bad and the very brutal violence that takes place during this time is kept brief. I very much enjoyed the book and I thank Nonna's family for sharing. It also has

notes from her children and also a timeline of her life at the end that also has general events in Russia which I found quite interesting.

I bought *The Secret Holocaust Diaries* a few weeks ago and started reading it. What an amazing book! Nonna Bannister was a gifted young Russian girl from a loving, warm, and wealthy family. Caught up in the horror of World War II, she watched everything and everyone she knew and loved disintegrate before her eyes. Yet Nonna miraculously survived, with her faith intact and her secret diaries hidden away, known only to her until recently. What is most astonishing to me was Nonna's lack of bitterness and hatred for the perpetrators of the savagery she witnessed--possible only with divine forgiveness, I'm sure, but still difficult to fathom. Reading *The Secret Holocaust Diaries* is like sitting down to tea with Nonna, as she unveils the secrets carefully packed away in her locked green trunk in the attic. Even her husband didn't learn about her past until their twilight years, when she decided it was finally time to tell him. I'm so glad she decided to share. Nonna's voice is powerful; after I read a passage and close the book, her lovely and heartwrenching prose stays with me. This is the type of book you don't want to read too fast; I'm savoring it, page by page.

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