

Hiding in Plain Sight: How a Jewish Girl Survived Europe's Heart of Darkness

Pieter van Os

David Doherty, Translator

Scribe Publications (Jan 3, 2023)

Softcover \$20.00 (384pp)

978-1-957363-04-2

Dutch journalist Pieter van Os's *Hiding in Plain Sight* is the biography of Mala Rivka Kizel, the only person in her Orthodox Jewish family to survive the Holocaust, which she did by passing as a gentile in Poland and Germany.

Born in Warsaw into a Yiddish-speaking Hasidic family, Mala was exposed to life outside of her community due to being in a classroom with Catholic children. She became fluent in Polish and learned Catholic prayers. When the Nazis imprisoned the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, her ability to pass for Polish helped her to smuggle extra food in from the outside. After escaping the ghetto, this also helped her make her way through Poland to Germany for work. There, Mala's familiarity with German came from knowing Yiddish. She made up a tale about having a German mother to convince an SS immigration committee that she was Volksdeutsche, an ethnic German. She was placed with a Hitler-revering family who loved her and whom she came to love.

One of the book's themes is Mala's radically different experience of the war and of Germans, which made coming to terms with the tragedy that befell her family and other Polish Jews all the more jarring. Van Os situates Mala's life in a broader European context, interweaving personal and historical details to illuminate events such as acts violence committed against Jews who returned to post-war Poland and the subsequent immigration of many to Israel. This was the path taken by Mala and her eventual husband.

Though it is impossible to fully reconstruct the past when so many of its people and places have been obliterated, the biography *Hiding in Plain Sight* works to preserve what memories it can. It's a meticulous, engaging, and thoughtful book.

YELENA FURMAN (January / February 2023)

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