

Nina Bassat

Title: *Take the Child and Disappear: A Memoir*

Author: Nina Bassat

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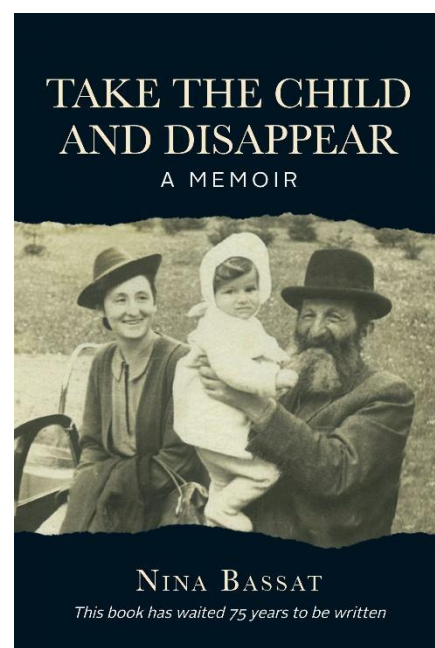
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Sydney Jewish Museum, State Library of Victoria and most public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Ukraine: Lviv (Lwów); Poland: Jędrzejów, Wrocław (Breslau); Germany: Bad Wörlshofen and Josefsheim DP camps, Munich; France: Paris; Australia: Melbourne.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative.

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: child survivor; ghetto; in-hiding.



Take the Child and Disappear is the 175-page memoir of child survivor Nina Bassat who endured the Lwów ghetto with her mother before escaping and surviving in hiding with their former maid. She emigrated to Melbourne in 1949 and eventually became a prominent member of the Jewish community, earning the Order of Australia Medal for her services.

Pages 1-40 briefly describe the author's return to Poland in 2012, followed by an account of the pre-war Jewish community and the lives of her parents. Pages 41-78 relate the onset of the war, her time in the Lwów ghetto with her mother from 1941-42, and the fate of her family. Pages 79-116 describe their liberation and life in DP camps. Pages 117-43 detail their emigration to Australia and reflect on the lasting impact of the Holocaust. Pages 144-75 discuss her extensive Jewish community service.

Janina 'Nina' Bassat (née Katz) was born on 8 April 1939 in Lwów, Poland, to Hadassa Wargoń and Izydor Katz. The outbreak of war soon after her birth led to the Soviet occupation of Lwów, then in June 1941 by Nazi Germany. A few weeks later, members of the Nazi collaborationist Ukrainian People's Militia arrested her father at their home. He was never seen again. Many years later, Nina learnt he was murdered in a pogrom perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists in retaliation for the death of their leader.

In September, Nina and her mother were forcibly relocated to the Lwów ghetto. While there, their former maid, Marysia, secretly assisted them by selling her mother's belongings on the black market and smuggling food into the ghetto. Hadassa managed to secure life-saving work in the Jesuit gardens outside the ghetto. In autumn 1942, while Hadassa was at work, Nina and her grandmother were rounded up for deportation to the death camps. After being alerted by one of the Polish gardeners, Hadassa frantically returned to the ghetto where she found Nina and her grandmother

being herded away with a large group of deportees. After pleading with the German soldier guarding the group to spare their lives, he told Hadassa to “take the child and disappear”. However Nina’s grandmother could not be saved and she was murdered in the Bełżec extermination camp.

During their time in the ghetto, Nina and her mother survived in hiding during multiple round-ups. One-by-one their extended family was deported to the camps. With the ghetto’s imminent liquidation, Hadassa secured false identity papers and in the spring of 1943 escaped with Nina to the home of their former maid, Marysia. Using gold that Hadassa had hidden, Marysia purchased a house on the outskirts of Lwów, providing them with greater safety away from suspicious neighbours.

As fighting near Lwów intensified the family spent much of their time hiding in the cellar. In July 1944, when Nina was just five-years-old, they were liberated by the Russian army. After the war, Hadassa travelled to Krakow and, leaving Nina with a friend, visited her hometown of Jędrzejów. There, she discovered that her home had been taken over by strangers and that her parents and brother had been murdered by the Germans. She was later reunited with her surviving brother, Sam, who came to collect Nina. The family moved to Jędrzejów and fought to reclaim their home, but they were unsuccessful until decades later. After the violent Kielce pogrom in 1946 they fled to Breslau, losing contact with Marysia.

In Breslau, Nina quickly became fluent in German after being cared for by a German housemaid. After much searching, Hadassa eventually found her sister, Sara, and niece, Masha (who had survived a death march from Auschwitz) at the Bad Wörishofen DP camp in Bavaria. The family survivors reunited there in late 1946, and lived in the smaller Josefsheim camp. Nina received an interrupted education. Tragically, her Aunt Sara died of an infection in 1947. After their emigration applications to Palestine were rejected they decided to emigrate to Australia, driven by the desire to leave Europe. With the help of Masha's uncle in Melbourne they secured landing permits and in November 1948 they left Bad Wörishofen for Melbourne, arriving in February 1949.

In Melbourne, the family initially lived with Masha’s relatives, the Kochens. Despite knowing no English, Nina was enrolled in primary school, where she quickly adapted and excelled. In 1953, her mother remarried Abe Teicher, who became a loving stepfather to Nina. At sixteen, Nina met Bob Bassat, whom she married in February 1960. They had three children: Sally, Andrew, and Paul. In 1957 Nina gained entry into the University of Melbourne where she studied arts and law and later opened her own legal practice.

Since the mid-1980s, Nina has been an influential leader in the Australian Jewish community, serving on numerous councils and committees. In 1996, she became the first woman to serve as President of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and in 1999 became the first Holocaust survivor to head the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. In recognition of her decades of service to the Jewish community and promotion of greater community understanding she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2004.

Take the Child and Disappear is a deeply personal and detailed memoir that explores the Holocaust and its legacy from multiple perspectives. Recollecting her experiences and those of her family, the author reflects on how being a child survivor shaped her life. The memoir grapples with themes of loss and identity, and highlights the strength and resilience of her mother. It is as much an account of her mother's life as of her own. To reconstruct her harrowing experiences, and those of her family, the author conducted extensive research, drawing from survivor memoirs, archives and interviews with her mother and surviving relatives.