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Hanna's Diary, 1938-1941: Czechoslovakia to Canada

Hanna Spencer

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From the preface: "For forty-five years I had not opened the wooden box with the fancy hand-carved lid. I knew what was in it. Together with miscellaneous keepsakes and photographs, it contained six notebooks written in German. This was the journal I kept from 1938 to 1941, during a crucial period in many people's lives, including mine. The box had remained locked since 1942, when I had pulled down my own "iron curtain," shutting out the memories preserved on those pages. But the time eventually came for the curtain to be raised. The main reason for this change of mind was my profound regret that I had not quizzed my parents more about their personal history; I didn't want this to happen to my children and grandchildren. Thus I brought myself to open the box, literally and figuratively, and set about translating the diaries from German into English - strictly for the use of my family, or so I thought." Hanna Fischl, a Czech of Jewish descent, was a twenty-four-year-old teacher in a German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia when Hitler's shadow loomed over Europe in 1938. No longer able to associate openly with her lover, Hans Feiertag, the talented, Christian composer whom she had loved since her teens, she began writing a diary at his request so that, once they were reunited, he could learn about her life while they had been apart. Written in a touching and candid style, Hanna's Diary, 1938-1941 is the result of that request. Hanna's Diary, 1938B1941 offers an intimate view of sweeping historical events that engulfed Europe and the world, evoking the creeping fear, desperate hopes, desertion of friends, and sense of isolation that Hanna Spencer felt as Nazism spread. The diary follows Spencer to England - where she faced misery of a different kind - and then to Canada, where, as a young immigrant with a PhD, she worked in her uncle's glove-making factory before finally landing a teaching job in Ottawa. Spencer describes her experiences lecturing on Czechoslovaki's history and its takeover by the Nazis, and her resulting celebrity on the Ontario lecture circuit. Written with clear wit and a sharp eye for detail, Hanna's Diary, 1938B1941 is a must-read for anyone interested in the human side of the Second World War.

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