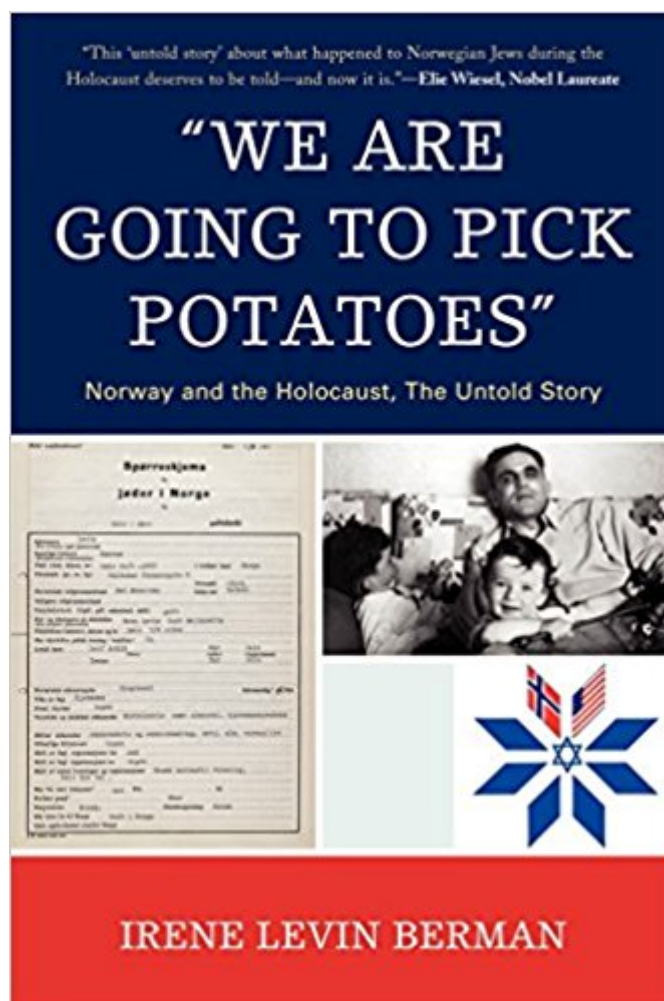


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# 'We Are Going To Pick Potatoes': Norway And The Holocaust, The Untold Story



## Synopsis

This book tells of growing up Jewish in Norway during and after WWII. As a young child, the author escaped from the Nazis to neutral Sweden with her immediate family. The author's identity as a Norwegian and a Jew led her to explore previously unopened doors in writing this memoir.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Irene [Levin] Berman tells an important and [not](#) for most Americans [not](#) unknown story about the destiny of the Norwegian Jews during WW II. Being herself a Holocaust survivor, her style is emotionally very strong, though factual and sober. This comprehensive, moving and heart-rending book, with a welcome underlying optimism in spite of traumatic experiences, deserves a wide circle of readers in the U.S.A, far beyond those of Norwegian descent. (Arnfinn Moland, director, Norway's Resistance Museum) The story of the effort and extent to which the Nazi war machine would reach out in order to annihilate even the most remote Jewish family. The story of indifference and courage, of despair and hope, of silence and action. A very Jewish and very human story which should be told and listened to. (Michael Melchior, Chief Rabbi of Norway, Former Cabinet Minister of Israel) Irene Levin Berman has written a powerful, deeply moving book about a people, a place, and a time unfamiliar to many Americans. It is a story that should be widely known and remembered by all. (Edward P. Gallagher, President, The American-Scandinavian Foundation) Contemplating such a stomach-turning subject matter alongside the endearing intimate family details you offer is not easy, but the opportunity to learn a little about your remarkable family is a blessing to cherish. It is unimaginable to me the incredible courage, commitment, wisdom, and

fortitude you had to muster to start and complete this work, and to render its content so thoughtfully and effectively. (Nik Sten, Director, Norwegian Club of San Francisco)Unexpectedly precious. (Benjamin Ivry Foreword Reviews, June 2010)It wasn't until 2005 that Irene Levin Berman forced herself to examine what it meant to her to be a Holocaust survivor. Even after so many years, she strongly identified as a Jew and a Norwegian, as well as a United States citizen, but not having been in a ghetto or camp, she didn't feel 'worthy' of the label 'survivor.' In 'We Are Going To Pick Potatoes': Norway and The Holocaust, The Untold Story, she describes what happened to the Jews of Norway during the Holocaust, focusing mainly on her particular family; this is as much an autobiography as an account of flight and resettlement in hospitable Sweden. A child of four when she was told 'We are going to pick potatoes,' she and her family embarked on a tortuously dangerous journey across the Alps to reach neutral Sweden, just missing the Gestapo roundup of November 26th for the purpose of mass arrests. It was 1942, and the Norwegian Jews who remained in Norway did not realize the danger they were in....Although this is primarily an account of the fate of the author's extended family during the Holocaust, it is nevertheless an important addition to the library of survivor testimony since not much is known about Norwegian Jews during this period. (Jewish Book World)This 'untold story' about what happened to Norwegian Jews during the Holocaust deserves to be told—and now it is. (Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate)

Irene Levin Berman, a native of Norway, has lived in the United States most of her adult life. She is a professional translator of Scandinavian languages and has co-translated seven plays by Henrik Ibsen, Norway's renowned playwright. 'We Are Going to Pick Potatoes': Norway and the Holocaust, The Untold Story, which was first written in Norwegian by Ms. Berman and published in Norway in 2008, was translated into English by the author herself. To learn more about the book, and to get updates on Ms. Berman's latest appearances and events, please visit [www.norwayandtheholocaust.com](http://www.norwayandtheholocaust.com).

Mrs. Berman found her way to the United States and has many years under her belt to ferret out the differences between Norwegian and American Jews. After just returning from a trip to Scandinavia, I was particularly interested in her memoir. But I found it poorly organized, especially putting a chapter about "The Myth of the Danish King" toward the back of the book, and making it not relate to anything else in her story. She says the King did not actually ever wear a Jewish star; we don't find out why she is sure of this. She doesn't substantiate her report of this, even though there is mention of the king doing this in the movie "Exodus". Yes, it sounds too good to be true, but we

don't know how she came up with her chapter title. An analysis of why the Danish Jews escaped with very few deaths is not evaluated sufficiently well. Of course having gone to the Danish Holocaust museum, and seeing the writings of schoolchildren to thank the king for his heroics had an impact on me. Mrs. Berman was very close to aunts and uncles, whose stories she put in the book. It's disappointing to not know more about her own father, who died too soon, and died an honored champion of his fellow Jews who needed resettlement and aid during and after WWII. So we learn a lot about some things, but other things are just briefly mentioned and could be embellished.

There could be no more authoritative source for the story of what happened to Jewish families in Norway during the German occupation than this. The author's note revealing how and why she was determined to write it are equally powerful. At a time when literally millions of European Jews were being tortured and murdered in Hitler's calculated genocide machine, the small population in Norway was not overlooked. In fact, in the effort to make Norway the GERMAN FORTRESS IN THE NORTH, the total elimination of Jews from that country was an achievable goal that became a source of pride for the occupying forces. By the end of the war when Germany's meticulously documented numbers were tallied, Norway's death rate of the original Jewish population neared 40%, one of the two highest of all the countries affected. Berman's extensive documentation of her family's lives before, during, and after the occupation achieve far more than a family memoir. There is pain in the process, and not all survived. That any did is a story worth reading. The accuracy and verifying resources make this a reliable primary source and one that reads with sensitivity and strength. You don't have to be Norwegian nor Jewish (I am neither) to feel shaken and changed by this book.

This story tells the first-hand viewpoint of a child in a Jewish family in Norway who fled to Sweden to save their lives in the Holocaust. It is backed up by recollections of friends and family members whose memories explained what a child could not comprehend. The small population of Norway has mistakenly given rise to the idea that the Jewish population there was not affected so much by that time in history, but this book personalizes the devastation there. The author spent a bit more time and energy in criticizing the government regarding its attitude and actions (or lack thereof) than was necessary. Altogether, though, this story is a good supplement to anyone's general knowledge of the Holocaust and especially of a scarcely populated country which gets little attention.

It was a wonderful story but poorly written book. Hard to rate it based on the gap between the writing and the story. Almost nothing has been written about Norwegian Jews and the holocaust, so it was eye opening from that standpoint.

I was very surprised with the information in the book, information which I did not know about regarding Jews in Norway during WWII. The book is well written and kept my interest throughout. I would highly recommend it to anyone wanting to learn more about Norway, the Jews who lived there and how some were able to survive the Holocaust.

Irene Levin Berman deserves great praise for telling the history of the Jews in Norway and in particular their experience in relation to the Holocaust. It is a travesty that the world has been relatively uninformed about this culture in Scandinavia. Ms Berman's personal voice echoes with every word. I highly recommend this publication.

I read this book awhile back. Everyone should read this book. How painful to be treated in such an inhumane way just because they were Jewish!! This story touched my heart deeply and I pray no one will ever have the power to cause such havoc again. God put us all on earth and we had better start loving and caring for each other. NOWHelen Cosgrove

Wonderful account of Norwegian children during the Nazi occupation of World War II. A first person experience of the war and its affects on the children and how their families coped with the terror of the war in their own neighborhoods.

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