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17 February 2016

Hi Steven

Thanks so much for the copy of your book which I received on Thursday last and the accompanying kind words in the front – much appreciated!!

There is so much to say about this book that I have difficulty knowing where to start. With this kind of subject matter it's difficult, if not somewhat inappropriate, to say that I enjoyed reading your book. However, I guess the biggest compliment I can give you is that I started reading on Friday and finished the entire text more or less in one sitting – a rare occurrence for me. I became so engrossed in this very sad story and your painful journey to uncover it, that reading went into the wee hours of the night. Like you, I too in some weird way gradually became entrapped by the image of the three women on the front cover, as if they were my family, or people I ought to know and to whom I bear some unknown responsibility - their powerful gaze imploring me to read on every time I closed the book to go to sleep.

A very real 'danger' of this text and something which I was very mindful of from the outset, is that one could quite easily read it as just another example of dozens of similar historical texts on the unspeakable horrors of suffering and genocide which had been published in the wake of World War II – the over-exposure to inhumanity and death often resulting in indifference, something which you also allude to towards the end of the book.

Naturally the all too familiar horror images of genocide will always shock, but the really unsettling aspect of this text is that you skilfully draw the reader into your family space, into your private intimate family memory, forcing one to become part of the family victims' suffering and your second/third generation painful journey of discovery. The real punch in the gut is thus delivered once an image of a complete stranger victim becomes personalised -

it then drives home the real and personalised horror of suffering and death of very ordinary, innocent people in a different way than the graphic familiar images of unknown dead bodies.

Furthermore, what really makes your book so compelling to read is the shocking realisation that cruelty committed against innocent people continue to inflict wounds on those who survived, and even those who were not even targeted in the first place. While you focus quite a lot on your father Herbert's silence, the world closing in on his sister Edith, and mother Cecilie's predicament of desperately trying to protect the family, to me it's really Hildegard's image that came to haunt me throughout the read and beyond: the one who everyone 'refers' to, but who never spoke herself, the one who had to accept what plans were made on her behalf, but who could not make these herself, or be indifferent towards some things like Edith, the one who needed protection the most, but got none and died a lonely and fearful death. To me she became the personification of the dreadful fate of a family on a very dark page in the history of mankind.

On a different level your finest moment in telling this story is the brilliant content analysis of Cecilie's letters, positioning this text firmly within the History from below genre.

I believe that 'history from below' is history which preserves, and which *foregrounds*, the marginalised stories and experiences of people who, all else being equal, did not get chance to author their own story. History from below tries to redress that most final, and brutal, of life's inequalities: whether or not you are forgotten. (David Hitchcock, 'Why history from below matters more than ever')

Without going into a full review of your book, I think the above says it all about your story.

I think your book reaffirms an old saying we all know, but always need to be reminded of:

'It didn't start with the gas chambers – it started with politicians dividing the people with 'us vs them', it started with an intolerance and hate speech and when people stopped caring, became desensitized and turned a blind eye'

Finally, congratulations on breaking the family silence, for 'unburdening' your boys and making it possible for them to grow up just being ordinary Jewish boys, or anything else they choose to be. I think you have succeeded in what Cecilie and Herbert so desperately wanted to achieve.

Kind regards

Aubrey