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But You Did Not Come Back: A Memoir



Synopsis

“You might come back, because you’re young, but I will not come back.” Marceline Loridan’s father wrote her, 1944. A runaway bestseller in France, *But You Did Not Come Back* has already been the subject of a French media storm and hailed as an important new addition to the library of books dealing with the Holocaust. It is the profoundly moving and poetic memoir by Marceline Loridan-Ivens, who at the age of fifteen was arrested in occupied France, along with her father. Later, in the camps, he managed to smuggle a note to her, a sign of life that made all the difference to Marceline; but he died in the Holocaust, while Marceline survived. In *But You Did Not Come Back*, Marceline writes back to her father, the man whose death overshadowed her whole life. Although her grief never diminished in its intensity, Marceline ultimately found her calling, working as both an activist and a documentary filmmaker. But now, as France and Europe in general faces growing anti-Semitism, Marceline feels pessimistic about the future. Her testimony is a memorial, a confrontation, and a deeply affecting personal story of a woman whose life was shattered and never totally rebuilt.

Book Information

Hardcover: 112 pages

Publisher: Atlantic Monthly Press (January 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 080212450X

ISBN-13: 978-0802124500

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 7.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 35 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #398,511 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #230 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Movie Directors #339 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Jewish #790 in Books > History > World > Jewish > Holocaust

Customer Reviews

Praise for *But You Did Not Come Back*: Named a Book of the Year by the Economist Winner of the National Jewish Book Award (Biography, Autobiography and Memoir) Named a Memoir of the Year by the Times (UK) “A profoundly moving testimony of the challenges of survival, a wake-up call to those who ignore the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, and a stunning tribute to her late father, *But You Did Not Come Back* is heartbreaking, important, and unlike anything that has preceded

it. [André Aciman](#) I read this book in one sitting, it was unputdownable, an astonishing account of a family caught up in the Holocaust [in its turbulent wake](#), so deeply sad and very, very moving. Most striking to me was the brutal honesty and clarity of her relationship with her father who, despite his murder by the Nazis, is still very much with her more than fifty years later, and the question, so troubling, as to whether it would have been better if he had come back instead of her. [Thomas Harding](#), author of *Hanns and Rudolf* “In tight, unsparing prose, [Loridan-Ivens] confronts the delusions her father held, and the lies she told herself. A small book with a big voice.” [Economist \(Books of the Year 2016\)](#) [Profound and moving . . . elegantly rendered into English by Sandra Smith . . . \[This\] slim but powerful book is both a vital account of her survival and a tender reply to her father . . . Seldom do such short books make so big an impact . . . Her important and miraculous testimony will endure.](#) [Minneapolis Star Tribune](#) [Extraordinary, unflinching and deeply moving . . . \[Loridan-Ivens\] describes her experiences with a resolute commitment to detail; there is the brutal, visceral truth . . . and there are harrowing stories . . . But there is no room for sentimentality in Loridan-Ivens’ honest and self-aware prose: the facts of her incarceration speak emotively enough . . . Very occasionally a book comes along that demands to be published, to be read, to be talked about. A book about pain and suffering, about cruelty and humanity, about grief and love. But You Did Not Come Back is an exquisitely written, beautifully translated and unwaveringly honest testimony; a story we will all do well never to forget.](#) [Guardian](#) [In this powerful book \[Marceline Loridan-Ivens\] tells of her harrowing experiences in the extermination camp, of her intense desire to go on living and how to bear the pain of surviving when her father did not.](#) [Daily Express \(Best Memoirs of the Season\)](#) “In simple language, without frills or excessive descriptions, [Loridan-Ivens] brings the atrocities of the Holocaust to light as lived by a teenage girl.” [Key Peninsula News](#) [Loridan-Ivens brings the clarity of an adolescent’s lucid memory to her writing; subtly translated by Sandra Smith . . . woven into her story is such a lucid, life-giving spirit infusing the tales of heroism she casually tells, as well as the guilty secrets she discloses, that this reader, for one, wants to thank this courageous, honest woman for her transformative story.](#) [Jewish Chronicle](#) [Who is a survivor? What does a survivor remember? How does a survivor continue to struggle throughout his or her life? Marceline Loridan-Ivens powerfully and honestly answers these questions in her short but graphic volume of painful remembrance . . . Marceline presents her struggle to survive in personal, forthright, and raw prose . . . An important and piercing first-hand testimony.](#) [Jewish Book](#)

Council; A brief, unforgettable memoir. – Jewish

Week; Lorian-Ivens' memoir is an instructive presentation of camp experience and its aftermath . . . But You Did Not Come Back . . . pushes our understanding of the war and its aftermath into new territory. – Canadian Jewish News [A] devastating memoir. [Lorian-Ivens] refuses all pity in this slim but intense testimony . . . Her great achievement is to articulate the astonishing camaraderie and love among the incarcerated, and later the attritional shadow of war, as her family, and she herself, fractures, yet keeps surviving.

Profound. – Times (UK) (Memoirs of the Year) ; Despite its gruesome subject matter, the book has moments of bleak humour and its affirmation of human tenderness instils a kind of joy in the reader . . . In just 100 pages, Lorian-Ivens goes to the heart of father-daughter relations; the result is a masterpiece of restraint and luminous precision . . . Exquisitely translated by Sandra Smith, But You Did Not Come Back is a human chronicle of rare

power. – Financial Times; [A] searing, profoundly moving memoir . . . Smoothly translated by Sandra Smith . . . But You Did Not Come Back is a beautiful testimony to filial love that sounds a powerful, dire alarm. It is also a reminder that forgetting atrocity isn't an

option. – Christian Science Monitor; Lorian-Ivens writes in a plain, conversational style . . . that flows as memory does, observation and recollection in balance. It can be read at a sitting; and then asks to be read again. For even at this distance, when we think we know what happened, and what history tells us, the truth, as seen through Marceline's clear-eyed gaze, astonishes and horrifies . . . There is kindness, too, and courage in this book: not

least the author's courage in choosing to live. – New Statesman; [A] deeply moving account . . . The death camps are evoked in their full horror . . . This is a haunting and beautiful book, valuable not only for the first-hand experience of the worst atrocity in living

history, but also for its illustration of the long-term effects of trauma, the persistence of anti-Semitism and the enduring power of love. – Independent (UK); The year has barely started but already one of the most beautiful books of the year has been published. Short, dense, powerful, in a word: overwhelming, with a simplicity of expression and a skill for creating an image. . . . you

will read it in one sitting. – Le Parisien; In this tormented time, this troubled period where the extreme right is showing its teeth all over Europe, Marceline Lorian-Ivens gives us a valuable lesson. . . . You read this with tears welling up in your eyes. . . . I'll say it again: read it. . . . [An] important book, [one] book you'll never

forget. – Challenges Magazine; A final, poignant address . . . In the pages of this book . . . words are spoken which have not been spoken before. – Le Monde des

Livres“In literature, every so often, there comes a miracle, a book, a text, an author, a writing style, a way of recounting something, refusing any pathos and any exposition, that says things about life and death. IÃÂm evoking But You Did Not Come Back. . . . [A] brief and marvelous opus.ÃÂLe Magazine LittÃfÃraire“Her testimony is of an extraordinary force The reasons for the wonderful success of this book in France are many. The book owes its reception in the first instance to the quality of the story. Marceline Loridan-Ivens, in spite of the darkness of the events described, avoids any kind of pathos. In radio and television interviews after publication, she has shown an extraordinary pugnacity Now more than ever, it is necessary that we listen to the testimony of this survivor.ÃÂLe Figaro“Film-maker, writer, activist, Marceline Loridan-Ivens was deported at the age of 15, together with the father. She survived, but he did not. Seventy years after the liberation of Auschwitz, she takes up a dialogue with him, in But You Did Not Come Back You can still very clearly see a little girl in the rebellious, cheerful, and slightly cloaked face of this petite woman of eighty-six.ÃÂElle (France)“A precious story, seventy years after the liberation of Auschwitz. . . . [Loridan-Ivens] is speaking about the France of today, the country where [in January, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks] four people were killed in a grocery store because they were Jews. Her testimony is perhaps one of the last, and more than ever it deserves to be read and heard.ÃÂLes Inrockuptibles“The words of Marceline Loridan-Ivens have an exceptional force. You have to read these words surrounded by a reverence which is appropriate, but in fact from the very first line, a silence descends, and nothing matters until you have read the last line, and no one could forget those words. You might think that after Primo Levi, Robert Antelme, Claude Lanzmann, there was nothing left to say. But Marceline Loridan-Ivens proves the opposite. Her book gets its force from her anger and her pain, which are still completely intact, even amplified by this ‘time that doesnÃÂt pass.ÃÂLe Journal du Dimanche“A dry, tough, violent book The era of the first-hand witnesses of victims of this genocide is drawing to a close and this testimony, which is absolutely singular, will stun and chill the reader.ÃÂLe Banquet des Mots“This book shook France, and it will shake Germany too A declaration of love to the father she lost in the camps that will leave no-one unmoved. Above all, But You Did Not Come Back is the testimony of a relentless fighter, describing in hard-to-bear detail her survival of the barbed wire, the railway platforms, the crematoriums, and also what came after that: the life as someone who survived. The arc that Marceline Loridan-Ivens traces in her book reaches from the early postwar period to the Paris of 1968 to post-Charlie-Hebdo France That her return from Auschwitz did not bring her peace is the dark core of her account.ÃÂFrankfurter

Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany)“Marceline Loridan-Ivens has lived with harrowing memories of Auschwitz for seven decades. And she insists that the fight against anti-Semitism is far from over . . . [A] poignant memoir.—Sunday Times (UK)“Simultaneously cynical and ardent . . . hypnotic.—Globe and Mail“Is there anything else to say about the Holocaust that hasn't already been said? The disturbing answer is yes . . . [A] stark, brief memoir (in a beautiful translation by Sandra Smith) . . . An incredible indictment of France's complicity with the Nazis . . . But You Did Not Come Back is as disturbing an account of what it was like to return from the extermination camps as anything I have read.—CounterPunch“In contrast to similar extermination-camp memoirs, which necessarily relate familiar instances of Nazi brutality and the same strokes of pure luck that kept a few prisoners from the gas chambers, But You Did Not Come Back focuses on the affliction of women. The effects of suffering and depravation were devastating and sometimes permanent . . . It's also tragically true that anti-Semitism and religious conflict, as she points out, once again represent major threats to contemporary France. The book ends with a question as harrowing as it is fundamental.—Arts Fuse

Marceline Loridan-Ivens was born in 1928. She has worked as an actress, a screenwriter, and a director. She directed *The Birch-Tree Meadow* in 2003, starring Anouk Aimée, as well as several documentaries with Joris Ivens. Sandra Smith is the translator of *Suite Française* and eleven other novels by Irène Némirovsky, as well as a new translation of Camus's *L'Étranger*. She has been awarded the French-American Florence Gould Foundation Translation Prize and the PEN Translation Prize. She lives in New York.

hard to say i "love" such a gut wrenching and personal book. i read an interview with marceline loridan ivens in the new york times and then decided to search down and buy this book. it is absolutely interesting and one of the best accounts of how the experience of the concentration camps affected and infected this young, at the time, woman and how this has carried on through her life. how the recent upheavals in europe have added to her trauma and how she asks the one question at the end which must haunt all survivors. she has spoken truths about feelings and the precarious life of the jews in the world.

Beyond so many other accounts in its frank unearthing of any comfort or forgiveness. This survivor tells a tale so bare and real that it shocks us once again. But not with the atrocities of the evil but the

atrocities of how the evil never ended.

a sad true story about a teenager and her father arrested in France and sent to concentration camps. Father to Auschwitz, didn't survive, and she to Buchenwald, where she did, rather amazingly survive. She suffers survivor's guilt and talks of her experience in camp...terrible experience and very few female survivors who wonder why they are alive when so many people were killed by the Nazis

An exceptionally well written account of the deep and everlasting love a girl feels for her father who did not come back. She shows in a very moving way the permanent impact being sent to the camps had on her life. It's hard to put down and short enough to read in one sitting. I've read quite a number of memoirs related to the Holocaust and this is in the top tier.

Loridan-Ivens addresses this Auschwitz memoir to her father; she returned to France after the liberation but he perished in the camps. A short and very moving memoir: would make a good book for teaching at the college level.

This book is a compelling heart driven exposition of what the circumstances of the Holocaust meant to the individual author and her family. It is a short good read and a must for any father with a daughter and probably for any daughter.

Very quick read-45 minutes. Very emotional story in very simple language.

The most moving words of a survivor that I have ever read. Searing honesty and without sentimentality she relived for the reader what it really means to be a Survivor

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