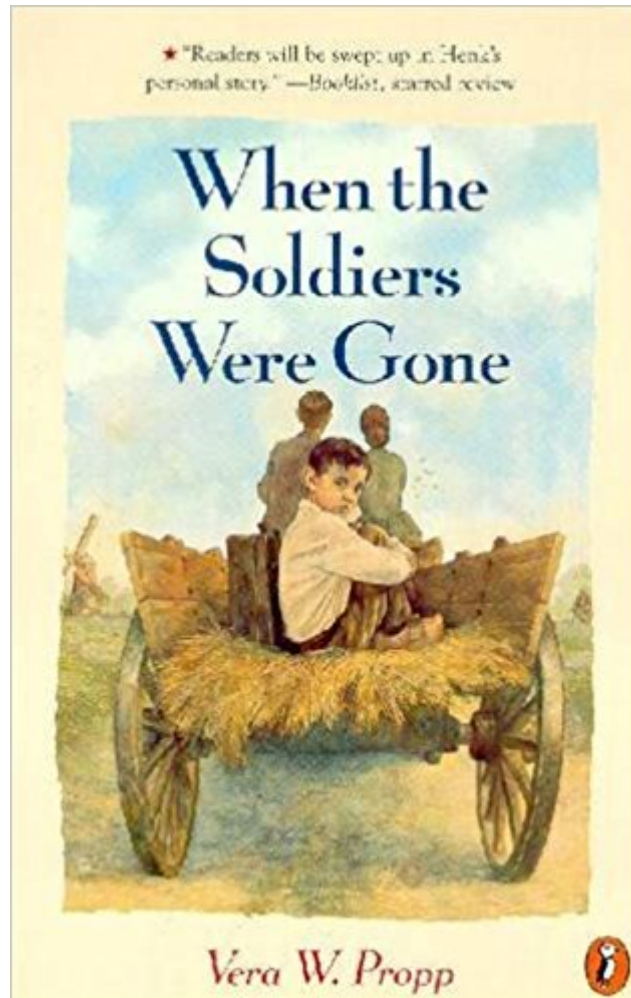




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When The Soldiers Were Gone



Synopsis

Henk was hidden on the farm when he was young and the Nazi soldiers came. But the war is over now, and Henk finds out that the people he lives with, the people he loves, are not his real family. He doesn't remember his real parents, and now a new life in the city lies ahead of him. Will things ever be the same?

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

A dramatic true event turns pallid in this unconvincing first novel set at the close of WWII. Living on a Dutch farm with Mama and Papa, Henk has rejoiced with them at the defeat of the "bad soldiers"?but his whole world turns upside-down when "Mama and Papa" tell him that they are not in fact his parents. Henk's real name, which he has forgotten, is Benjamin, and his real father and mother are David and Elsbet, Jews who have survived the war in hiding. The boy's reunion with his parents and his transformation from Henk to Benjamin should be exciting subjects, but the characterizations are so pat as to flatten the material. In attempting to narrate from Henk/Benjamin's perspective, Propp relies on artificial-sounding interior monologues with lots of wide-eyed questions: "It wouldn't be proper to call [David and Elsbet] by their first names. What should I call them, he

asked himself. How do I know they are really my parents as they say they are?" The dangers of the war, revealed in flashbacks and through Elsbet's conversations with her son, never take on immediacy. Middle-graders interested in a more authentic treatment of problems Dutch Jewish children faced in coming out of hiding after the war should see Ida Vos's novels *Hide and Seek* and *Anna Is Still Here*. Ages 10-up. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Grade 4-6?An uncomplicated account of a boy's readjustment after World War II in Holland. Eight-year-old Henk is stunned when he discovers that the family he has been living with are not his blood relatives. After being reunited with his biological parents, who are Jewish, Henk learns that his name is really Benjamin Van Sorg and that he was sent to live with a Christian family during the war. As he slowly adjusts to his new life and identity, memories from his early childhood gradually return, including the yellow star on his coat and a frightening encounter with a Nazi soldier. At the end of the book, when he and his parents return to their house, the place seems familiar and welcoming, and he finally feels that he is home. Propp's use of simple language helps the story flow smoothly. The author creates and sustains a mood that coincides with the readjustment phase that takes place after a trauma. Historical facts are successfully integrated into the narrative, and Henk's first-person telling makes the effects of the war tangible to readers. When the Soldiers Were Gone rates highly among other stories about the period, such as Jane Yolen's more sophisticated *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Viking, 1988) and David Adler's *Hilde & Eli* (Holiday, 1994). A moving, well-written novel. ?Adrian Renee Stevens, Beaver Creek School, West Jefferson, NC Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

For a 20 year-old like me, this was a quick, simple, short read, but for a kid, it's perfect. I read this when I was much younger and could only remember it was about living on a farm, having a cross on a necklace, his parents weren't his real parents and the cover had a boy on the back of a buggy. I couldn't remember the title and Google search was failing me, for once. So instead I looked up books about the Holocaust for children and eventually found it. And I'm so happy I did. The Holocaust was a low point in history. Full of the death and destruction of innocent people and people innocent of all wrong-doing...except helping those the Nazi's opposed, mostly, Jewish people and 'Jew-lovers' and sympathizers. This book is based on a true story (with creative liberties taken) and is very well written, detailed in all the right places and a fantastic read. A great story to introduce young children to one of the most shameful, bigotted times in history. If you liked

this book, I suggest reading: *The Good Liar* by Gregory Maguire *Behind the Bedroom Wall* by Laura E. Williams *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

My daughter absolutely loves this book. She read it at age 8 and asked for it again at age 14. She enjoyed it as much the second time.

Well written, moving story.

Eight-year-old Henk lives on a Dutch farm with Papa and Mama, Paul and Mevrouw Staal, older siblings Miep and Pieter, and cat Kootje. All he can remember is how he could never go to school with Miep and Pieter, and that every time the mean soldiers came he had to hide in the barn or a dirty clothes hamper. But now that the mean soldiers are gone, Henk is surprised to find out that he is really Benjamin, a Jewish child who was hidden from the Nazis, and that his true parents, David and Elsbet Van Sorg, have come to take him away with them. Will Henk, now Benjamin, be able to make the adjustment to a new family, a new home, and a new life? And how will he start? Based on a true story, much of the background for the plot is told in flashbacks, when Elsbet talks with her son and memories from his early childhood gradually return, including the yellow star on his coat and a frightening encounter in the park with a Nazi soldier who came out of his position and tried to hurt him. *When the Soldiers Were Gone* is a very moving account. With its use of simple language and the historical facts which are successfully integrated into the narrative, it is a great, age-appropriate introduction to the Holocaust and World War II for pre-teens.

Everything about this book is simple. The plot is simple. The writing is simple. The view is simple. And yet it is that that strikes the reader. Having read this several years ago as a young child, I found it all believable and understandable. I enjoyed it. Upon rereading it several years later, it became clear just HOW simple the book really is. Everything from the writing style to the way Henk (or Benjamin, the main character) sees the world and understands it is simple and basic. Nazism and racism are reduced to their simplest form - children mocking one another for no reason. The shock and despair that reigned in Europe after the Holocaust is shown as a lack of chocolate. The early signs of anti-semitism before the war against citizens are showed with Henk/Benjamin being told that he can no longer go to the park with his friends because he is Jewish. It is all quite interesting, but unless a young child is reading it, it's all a bit much. While, yes, the story is interesting and haunting and real, if someone can read something even more slightly complex, there are better

Holocaust stories out there. For children ages nine and up, I always recommend "The Devil's Arithmetic", an excellent book. "When the Soldiers Were Gone" can really only fit a tiny group of readers - slower children around ages nine or ten who would not deal with the more complex books but ought to know about what happened. Mostly, this is not a bad book. For an early reader, this is even a good book. However, as there are better books of similar topics out there, I'd recommend heading over to those first.

Have you ever been with someone else for so long that you don't know your real parents? It is based on a true story. It's about a boy named Henk who was hidden during the war. His real parents came to get him, but he doesn't remember them. When they got home they celebrated his return with cake. One day they went to the park, but Henk was afraid because he remembered when a Nazi soldier would come out of his position and try to hurt him. He remembers other things from his past, which help him adjust to his new life. I like this book because it's historical. It was after World War II. It also tells how Jewish people were treated. The soldiers didn't let the Jewish people do anything. After the war the Jewish people could have normal lives. I give it four stars, because it was good. It told what it was like while he was hiding during the war and went on with his life.

Have you ever read a War World II book before? Here is a book that describes what happens before, during, and after the war with children, mothers and fathers. I think the author wrote the book very well. She described what had happened. She told about the events and the characters. I feel the author really understands children, because she told about a young child. I feel the book was well written. One day after the war, two strangers walked up to Henk. Henk's real name is Benjamin. The two strangers were his mother and father. As he got to know them he started to remember. He was happy when he knew that they were his parents. What I think this book is a very sad story. I was surprised that this really happened to a man, who is still alive today. I rate the book five stars. It was hard to follow, because there were so many characters in the book. It was sad, but well written.

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