

# Memories of Glass

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Reminiscent of Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife*, this stunning novel draws from true accounts to shine a light on a period of Holland's darkest history and bravest heroes.

1942. As war rips through the heart of Holland, childhood friends Josie van Rees and Eliese Linden partner with a few daring citizens to rescue Eliese's son and hundreds of other Jewish children who await deportation in a converted theater in Amsterdam. But amid their resistance work, Josie and Eliese's dangerous secrets could derail their friendship and their entire mission. When the enemy finds these women, only one will escape.

Seventy-five years later, Ava Drake begins to suspect that her great-grandfather William Kingston was not the World War II hero he claimed to be. Her work as director of the prestigious Kingston Family Foundation leads her to Landon West's Ugandan coffee plantation, and Ava and Landon soon discover a connection between their families. As Landon's great-grandmother shares the broken pieces of her story, Ava must confront the greatest loss in her own life—and powerful members of the Kingston family who will do anything to keep the truth buried.

Illuminating the story and strength of these women, award-winning author Melanie Dobson transports readers through time and place, from World War II Holland to contemporary Uganda, in this rich and inspiring novel.

In 1942, three Dutch leaders concocted a wild, outlandish scheme to rescue Jewish children from deportation, right out from under the oppressive watch of their occupiers. And the Nazis never discovered their secret.

Before the war, The Netherlands had been a neutral country, welcoming many German Jewish refugees across the border, but on May 10 1940, after promising not to attack, Hitler's army swept furiously into Holland and overtook this beautiful land. The Dutch were stunned but consoled by promises that the persecution happening in Germany wouldn't occur in Holland. A special council--the Judenrat--was formed to meet the needs of Jewish residents, and they provided these Jewish citizens the best healthcare in the country at a camp called Westerbork.

Even as new regulations were implemented in Holland, many of the 140,000 Dutch Jews believed they were safe because the Nazis granted thousands of exemptions to their growing list of rules. Everything changed in July 1942 when the Nazis, assisted by the Judenrat, began rounding up Jewish citizens and cramming them into a gutted Amsterdam theater called Hollandsche Schouwburg. Residents waited there for days with little sustenance or fresh air before they were transported east.

Walter Siskind, the first of these three Dutch leaders, was a German Jewish salesman forced to oversee the registration and deportation of each man, woman, and child inside the theater. Across the street from the theater, separated by a tram line, were two brick-clad buildings that housed a daycare run by Henriette Pimentel, a matronly Jewish woman, and the Reformed Teachers' Training College with a young principal named Johan van Hulst.

The children housed at the theater were quite loud, annoying the German soldiers, so Walter befriended the commanding officer and suggested they transfer these kids to the daycare. After the officer concurred, Henriette readily agreed to host them, and Johan and some of his teaching students volunteered to help. But they all wanted to do more than just offer these children food and shelter before deportation. They wanted to save their lives.

The German records were quite meticulous and regulated, but Walter, Henriette, and Johan devised a seemingly impossible plan. With permission from the parents, away from the oversight of the Nazi officers, Walter began eliminating the names of children from the registry lists. Once he erased them, these children--in the eyes of the Nazis--ceased to exist.

Still the Nazis kept an eye on the daycare center so Johan and Henriette concocted a number of ways to steal these unregistered children away. When the tram divided the daycare from the watchful eye of soldiers, for example, students would smuggle the kids out in laundry baskets, burlap bags, and milk cans. Sometimes they would take a dozen children on a walk and return with eleven. Or a baby tucked away in its carriage would be replaced with a doll.

More than six hundred children were rescued from the Hollandsche Schouwburg.

A miracle.

Each child was escorted to a safe home by a resistance worker, saving their life, but two of the three leaders who orchestrated their rescue died during the war.

In 1943 Henriette was killed at Auschwitz after accompanying her staff and the remaining children in her care.

Walter was exempted from deportation, but his wife and daughter were not. He chose to leave on a train with them and many think he was killed in 1945 by fellow inmates at Auschwitz who thought he, a former employee of the hated Judenrat, was a traitor.

Johan van Hulst passed away last year at the age of 107. He knew that I was writing *Memories of Glass*, and it's been a great honor for me to connect with those who love him.

Most of the Dutch who rescued children didn't think they were heroic, and Dr. van Hulst was no exception. In fact, he once said: "I actually only think about what I have not been able to do. To those few thousand children that I could not have saved." (Het Parool)

The six hundred that he helped rescue, I suspect, think of him often.

*Memories of Glass* was written to reflect both the corruption and heroism in Holland during World War II. It is a tribute, I hope, to those who risked everything to save a Dutch child. "Like colored shards in sunlight, Melanie Dobson once again shines her light of truth in this

elegantly complex and gripping tale of the hidden terrors of the Netherlands during WWII. Memories of Glass is a remarkable story, and one that will linger in the hearts of readers long after the last page." (Kate Breslin, bestselling author of For Such a Time)

"Memories of Glass is a remarkable, multi-layered novel that weaves stories of friendship and faith in wartime Holland together with a modern-day orphanage in Africa. Memorable characters portray the complexity of human relationships and reveal the lasting consequences of our choices, whether cowardly or courageous, and the mysteries kept me turning pages...." (Lynn Austin, bestselling author of Legacy of Mercy)

"Breathtaking, heartbreaking, and ultimately uplifting, Memories of Glass shows the beauty of helping others, the ugliness of people helping only themselves, and the destructive power of secrets through the generations. Melanie Dobson's memorable characters and fine eye for detail bring the danger of the Netherlands under Nazi occupation to life. This novel will stay with you." (Sarah Sundin, award-winning, bestselling author of The Sky Above Us)

"Heart-wrenching history combines with gripping characters and Melanie Dobson's signature gorgeous writing to create a tale you won't be able to put down--and won't want to. Memories of Glass is an amazing, intricately woven story of finding light in the least likely of places." (Roseanna M. White, bestselling author of the Shadows Over England series)

"With WWII-era and present-day storylines equally enthralling and skillfully entwined, I couldn't stop turning the pages of Melanie Dobson's Memories of Glass. Drawn from history to highlight the Dutch resistance to Hitler's Nazi regime, the story is sweeping in its scope of setting, each vividly alive on the page, and its pace felt like a snowball rolling downhill, gaining in suspense as the life-and-death stakes mounted. Peopled with characters heroic, flawed, and unforgettable, Memories of Glass is sure to please longtime fans of Melanie Dobson's books as well as readers new to her novels." (Lori Benton, author of Many Sparrows and The King's Mercy)

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