

LEARNING THROUGH MEMOIR

‘Tell it to the Squirrels’ by Judy Kolt



Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.



(L to R) Stefan, tiny Izia (Judy), father Usas and Tosia



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Pre-War Jewish Life

Context: Judy describes aspects of her childhood as a young Jewish girl in the Polish town of Sieradz.

Page numbers: p16 ("The dressmakers' arrival...") to p16 ("...a magic childhood.")

Approximate word count: 250

GLOSSARY

parlour: formal living room

fabric: cloth

sturdy: strong

strewn: scattered

fittings: trying on clothes

obliged: made

hem: edge of a piece of cloth or clothing

invariably: always

fidget: move about restlessly

Tosia: Judy's older sister

timber mill: factory where trees are processed into timber

sidecar: capsule on the side of a motorbike for carrying passengers

Tatus: 'daddy' in Polish; Judy's father

hack: cut open with heavy blows

St Bernard: very large breed of dog

sledge: a vehicle or cart that can be pulled along snow or ice



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: War

Context: Judy describes her family's journey from the Lublin district to Warsaw, the Polish capital, shortly after the German invasion of Poland in 1939. She was about to turn three when the Nazis invaded Poland.

Page numbers: p19 ("Soon all the Jews...") to p20 ("...I could not possibly have survived.")

Approximate word count: 290

GLOSSARY

Lublin: the town near where Judy's family lived

'resettlement': a term used by the Germans when transporting Jewish people to camps and ghettos against their wishes

occupiers: in this case, Nazi Germany

Warsaw: Poland's capital and largest city

bribe: secret payment made to someone in authority in return for a favour

hastily: hurriedly

Tatus: 'daddy' in Polish; Judy's father

Gentile: non-Jewish

associates: partners

sadistic: cruel; actions of someone who enjoys hurting others

smuggle: secretly move goods against the rules

laboured: worked with great effort

dilapidated: run down; neglected

barn: farm building where animals or grain is kept

guardian angel: person or spirit who keeps you safe

genius: expert



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Persecution

Context: Judy describes how her family defied Nazi orders for Jews in her area to go to the nearby city of Lublin for 'resettlement'. Instead, her family fled to Warsaw, Poland's capital and biggest city, where they were hoping not to be recognised as Jews. The plan did not work, and the family was forced into the Warsaw Ghetto. Judy was three at the time.

Page numbers: p20 ("By and by, we arrived in Warsaw...") to p22 ("...sheer panic and terror.")

Approximate word count: 490

GLOSSARY

By and by: soon

Warsaw: Poland's capital and biggest city

herded: crammed in like animals

cattle: cows

Warsaw Ghetto: the biggest ghetto in Poland, where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

Nalewki 35: address where Judy's family lived in the ghetto

flourmill: factory where grain is made into flour

Zloczew: town in Poland

yellow stars: cloth badge featuring Jewish Star of David symbol that Jews were forced to wear

aimlessly: without purpose

limp: lifeless

fragments: small pieces

miraculously: amazingly

the new reality: the way things now were

Mamusia: 'mummy' in Polish; Judy's mother

illusion: false idea; impression

normalcy: state of being normal

aktzia (round-up): an action by the Nazis in which they arrested and sometimes murdered Jews

shack: basic hut or cabin

hiding: beating

pacify: calm

remorse: guilt

stubbornness: refusal to change

unconsciously: without thinking

trivial: minor; unimportant

succumbing: giving in to



(L to R) Stefan, tiny Izia (Judy), father Usas and Tosia



‘Tell it to the Squirrels’ by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Ghettoisation

Context: Judy describes her fourth birthday in Otwock Ghetto, where her family had been transferred from Warsaw Ghetto. Otwock is a city in Poland near Warsaw. Ghettos were poor parts of cities or towns where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food. Judy’s father had special papers that enable him – unlike other Jews – to get in and out of the ghetto. She outlines advice her father gave her.

Page numbers: p25 (“September, 1940 and it was...”) to p26 (“...didn’t understand what he was saying.”)

Approximate word count: 230

GLOSSARY

throne: seat for a king or other important person
lace: patterned material used as trimming
cape: cloak, often worn by a king
crown: circular headwear, usually worn by a king
stub: small remains of a used pencil

Tosia: Judy’s older sister
Tatus: ‘daddy’ in Polish; Judy’s father
responsible: mature
proud: show self-respect; unapologetic
solemn: serious



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Deportation

Context: Judy describes the deportation of two family members from Otwock Ghetto. Deportation was portrayed by the Nazis as an opportunity for Jewish people to move further east for the opportunity to work and live in peace. In fact, the family members were taken to the Treblinka death camp, where almost one million Jewish people were murdered.

Page numbers: p26 ("People started disappearing...") to p26 ("...cellar in Karczew.")

Approximate word count: 60

GLOSSARY

ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

liberation: freedom after the defeat of Nazi Germany

Treblinka: death camp in Poland where almost one million Jewish people were murdered; unlike many other camps, there was no capacity to work as a slave labourer at Treblinka – virtually all Jews transported there were murdered

Uncle Aleks: Judy's uncle

Grinszpan: Jewish friend of Judy's uncle Aleks

Kuczynski: non-Jewish Polish friend of Grinszpan

cellar: space underneath a house

Karczew: town in Poland



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Fleeing Persecution

Context: Judy describes being smuggled, along with her older sister Tosia, out of Otwock Ghetto by her father to save them from being deported to Treblinka death camp. She recounts being taken to stay with an elderly non-Jewish couple in Warsaw and being given a new identity. Her father tells Judy and her sister how to behave. Judy was four at the time.

Page numbers: p26 ("One night, my father came...") to p27 ("...that Aunt Jablonska told us about.")

Approximate word count: 240

GLOSSARY

septic toilet: toilet with an underground pit to collect waste

Tosia: Judy's older sister

ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

stationmaster: person in charge of a railway station

underground: secret organisation fighting against those in power, in this case the Nazis

Warsaw: Poland's biggest city and capital; in this instance, Judy is referring to that part of the Polish capital outside the ghetto

coincidence: chance

church: Christian house of worship (as opposed to a Jewish synagogue)

Tatus: 'daddy' in Polish; Judy's father

birth certificate: official record of someone's identity at birth

christening certificate: official record of someone's baptism as a Christian

convent: place where nuns live together as a community; some include schools

obedient: following instructions

utter: say

Mamusia: 'mummy' in Polish; Judy's mother

Jesus: for Christians, the son of God, a divine figure who was both God and man



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Hiding

Context: Judy describes the precarious (highly uncertain and dangerous) nature of life in hiding, including an event that forced her and her mother to abruptly change hiding places.

Page numbers: p36 ("Tosia and I stayed...") to p37 ("We left almost at once.")

Approximate word count: 220

GLOSSARY

Tosia: Judy's older sister

Jablonskis: the non-Jewish family that was hiding Judy, her mother and her sister

nosy: inquisitive

Polish woman: when Judy refers to 'Polish' in this context, she is referring to non-Jewish people to differentiate them from Jewish people; it should be noted that that Jewish people in Poland were also Polish and identified themselves as such

Częstochowa: Polish city

privilege: opportunity (Judy's mother was paying to work)

Tatus: 'daddy' in Polish; Judy's father

hissed: said harshly



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Resistance

Context: Judy's father organised for Judy and her older sister Tosia to go into hiding in a convent in Warsaw. Judy describes aspects of life in the convent, including the bravery of the nuns.

Page numbers: p42 ("Reading this, it could be easy to accuse...") to p43 ("...go near the infirmary.")

Approximate word count: 500

GLOSSARY

anti-Semitism: hatred of Jewish people [the first half of this sentence relates to an earlier passage that is not relevant to this extract]

harbouring: hiding

boarding school: live-in school for children in the convent

affection: warmth; kindness

Sisters: nuns; women who have devoted their lives to God

Sister Wanda: Wanda Garczynska, a nun at the convent who was honoured after the war for saving the lives of Jewish children

tortured: inflict severe pain, often in an attempt to get information

taboo: strictly prohibited

forbidden: banned

Nazis: members and supporters of the extreme right-wing political party that ruled Germany under Adolf Hitler

Tosia: Judy's older sister

ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

Gestapo: Nazi secret police

extraordinary: amazing

commitment: dedication

worldly: normal; ordinary

Kazimierzowska Street: the address of the convent in Warsaw

in partnership: together with

underground: secret organisation fighting against those in power, in this case the Nazis

immaculate: perfectly clean

habits: long, loose cloaks worn by nuns

prewar: before the war

stashed: hid

duration: period; length

chapel: small church

altar: sacred table in a church

nuns' enclosure: where the nuns slept, strictly banned to outsiders, particularly men

infirmary: sick bay

mumps: contagious virus that makes the face swell

epidemic: outbreak of disease



(L to R) Stefan, tiny Izia (Judy), father Usas and Tosia



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Courage

Context: Judy's father was arrested and killed by the Gestapo (Nazi secret police). Judy and her sister Tosia were forced to leave the convent and were hidden in a series of different places. They ended up being reunited with their mother while hiding on a farm. In this extract, Judy describes an episode in which Tosia became ill and was taken to hospital in Warsaw by the farmer's wife. She recounts going to visit Tosia with her mother, and almost getting caught in a round-up of Jewish people on the streets of Warsaw.

Page numbers: p102 ("Despite the better living conditions...") to p103 ("...to take her back with us.")

Approximate word count: 320

GLOSSARY

Tosia: Judy's older sister

Mamusia: 'mummy' in Polish; Judy's mother

diphtheria: an illness that can be fatal for children

painted her lips: put on lipstick

Warsaw: Poland's capital and largest city

aktzia (round-up): an action by the Nazis in which they arrested and sometimes murdered Jews

archway: a curved structure forming an entrance or exit

immaculately dressed: in perfect uniform

tailored: stylish

skeleton cross-bone: uniforms of the elite Nazi SS troops included a skull and cross-bones insignia

stern: harshly serious

gallantly: in an extremely polite manner

convenient: available

executed: killed

perspiration: sweat

secure: safe

wholesome: healthy



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Liberation

Context: Judy describes liberation and its immediate aftermath. She was in hiding at the time with her mother (Mamusia) and older sister Tosia in an attic in the Polish town of Piastow. Judy was eight at the time. Her father and dozens of other members of her extended family had been murdered in the Holocaust, although those who survived were as yet unaware of the extent of the death toll.

Page numbers: p105 ("I later learned that...") to p108 ("...three loaves of bread in her frozen arms.")

Approximate word count: 750

GLOSSARY

Russian offensive: attack by Russian army on Nazi held areas of Poland, including where Judy was in hiding

Piastow: town in Poland

attic: room in a roof space

39 Sienkiewicza Street: address where Judy was in hiding with her mother and sister Tosia

Sister Stafania: one of the nuns who had been helping Judy hide

Mamusia: 'mummy' in Polish; Judy's mother

chaos: confusion; disorder

westwards: the Russians were forcing the Germans to retreat to the west, towards Germany

Abramek: Judy's cousin

Lonja: Judy's cousin

Tosia: Judy's older sister

Tereska: a family friend

Aleksander (Alek): Judy's uncle

Czestochowa: Polish city

liberation: freedom following the defeat of the Nazis

cellar: space underneath a house

Lodz: Polish city

ghetto: poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

liquidated: the words used by Nazis for closing down a ghetto by rounding up all the remaining Jews and sending them to camps to be murdered or work as slave labourers

buttermilk: sour milk

donned: put on

narrowest: in this case, shortest

Jewess: female Jew

whimpering: crying weakly

minus: without

triumphantly: victoriously



'Tell it to the Squirrels' by Judy Kolt

Judy Kolt was born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1936. Her family ran a timber business and Judy enjoyed a carefree childhood until World War Two broke out in 1939. Judy, her mother and her sister Tosia were forced to live in the Warsaw and Otwock ghettos, although her father was able to obtain special papers that allowed him a greater degree of freedom. He smuggled the family out and Judy was sent into hiding with a new identity as a Catholic girl. Judy, her mother and Tosia survived, although her beloved father and dozens of members of her extended family were murdered by the Nazis. Judy came to Australia in 1952, where she eventually married and started a family of her own.

Theme: Return to Life

Context: After the war, Judy's family was confronted by poverty, hunger and antisemitism (hatred of Jews) in Poland. Her mother fled with Judy and her old sister Tosia to Germany, where they lived in a Displaced Persons (DP) camp run by the US Army while waiting for another country to accept them. In this extract, Judy describes aspects of life in the DP camp, including her experience at the camp school.

Page numbers: p129 ("Each child at our school...") to p131 ("...wait for me!")

Approximate word count: 380

GLOSSARY

traumatic: deeply distressing in a way that causes lasting emotional pain

adjust: get used to

vigilant: on the lookout

fringe: hair hanging down at the front of the face

seldom: rarely

administrators: people running the camp

orphans: children without parents

Gentile: non-Jewish

shame: self-blame; extreme embarrassment

plagued: continually worried

suspicion: fear; belief

Tatus: 'daddy' in Polish; Judy's father

