



## "WE ARE GOING TO PICK POTATOES" NORWAY AND THE HOLOCAUST, THE UNTOLD STORY

**Irene Levin Berman** was born and raised in Norway. As a young child in 1942 she escaped to Sweden, a neutral country during World War II, to avoid annihilation. Nazi Germany had invaded Norway and the deportation of two thousand Norwegian Jews had begun. Seven members of her father's immediate family were among the 771 victims who were unable to escape and were murdered in Auschwitz.

In 2005 Irene was forced to begin to examine the label of being a Holocaust survivor. Her strong dual identity as a Norwegian and a Jew led her to explore previously unopened doors in her mind. *"We Are Going to Pick Potatoes" Norway and the Holocaust, The Untold Story* is not a narrative of the Holocaust alone, but the remembrances of growing up Jewish in Norway during and after WWII.

*This "untold story" about what happened to Norwegian Jews during the Holocaust deserves to be told - and now it is.*

**Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate  
Activist, and probably the most renowned Holocaust survivor in the world**

The story of the effort and extent to which the Nazi war machine would reach out in order to annihilate even the most remote Jewish family. The story of indifference and courage, of despair and hope, of silence and action. A very Jewish and very human story which should be told and listened to.

**Michael Melchior, Chief Rabbi of Norway and Former Cabinet Minister of Israel**

This comprehensive, moving and heart-rending book, with a welcome underlying optimism in spite of traumatic experiences, deserves a wide circle of readers in the U.S.A, far beyond those of Norwegian descent.

**Arnfinn Moland, Director of Norway's Resistance Museum**

Irene Levin Berman has written a powerful, deeply moving book about a people, a place, and a time unfamiliar to many Americans. It is a story that should be widely known and remembered by all.

**Edward P. Gallagher, President, The American-Scandinavian Foundation**

### Author Biography

Irene Levin Berman, a native of Norway, has lived in the United States most of her adult life. She is a professional translator of Scandinavian languages and has co-translated seven plays by Henrik Ibsen, Norway's renowned playwright. *"We are Going to Pick Potatoes," Norway and the Holocaust, The Untold Story*, which was first written in Norwegian by Ms. Berman and published in Norway in 2008, was translated into English by the author herself. Her website is [www.norwayandtheholocaust.com](http://www.norwayandtheholocaust.com).

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## Responses to “We are Going to Pick Potatoes”

### Acclaim for “*We are Going to Pick Potatoes*”

I have just finished your book and I find that I cannot quite stop thinking about it. Until a few years ago, when my daughter went on a March of the Living trip to Poland (visiting the KZ camps) and Israel, I had begun to feel saturated with respect to the Holocaust. I thought it was time to move on...then my daughter arrived from the trip, unable to speak for days. When she began to speak, sharing the devastating details of what she had seen, smelled and felt, I knew the story has to be told again and again. There are as many stories as the number of souls who went into the camps and each story deserves to be heard. Your story is amazing on several levels; it lets the reader become acquainted with your wonderful family (you were blessed with a really remarkable family!) while it tells the story of the Norwegian Jews and Jewish customs and traditions in general. It also tells the story as experienced by a frightened little girl, trying to make sense of disturbing details. I can only begin to imagine what a difficult journey it must have been to re-experience all of it; coming face to face with that little girl forever locked inside of you. As I set out reading, I at first wondered about the simple unpretentious tone: you are a strong, well-educated woman and yet you chose to write in this simple, gentle way, rather than in a more intellectual style. Now I know that this is exactly the power of the book; the voice you had to have in order to come to terms with it all because the little girl's story, the questions and repressed feelings, had to be honored. Thank you also for enlightening me on details regarding Denmark!

V.D.

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What a tremendous blessing to read your extraordinary book "We Are Going to Pick Potatoes" yesterday -- thank you so much for creating and forwarding this amazing work!. Contemplating such a stomach-turning subject matter alongside the endearing intimate family details is not easy, but the opportunity to learn a little about this remarkable family is a blessing to cherish. It is unimaginable to me the incredible courage, commitment, wisdom, and fortitude Ms. Berman had to muster to start and complete this work, and to render its content so thoughtfully and effectively.

Nik Sten

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You made alive what most of us have only read in history books. I shed tears over the “disappeared Steinfelds.”

D. R.

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I did enjoy your book very much. The timing of your escape reminds me of suspenseful fiction--only it was real.

A. A.

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Thank you for putting so much work into making this contribution to Hartford and our combined cultural Jewish history.

B. B.

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One locomotive cheer for Irene Levin Berman...I quickly became absorbed in your book and have read it from beginning to end in 24 hours. It is clear that much labor went into its production and it is clearly a labor of love...I have always felt that life was a series of "what ifs"...what if Sweden and Norway didn't share a common border? What if Sweden had not been a neutral country?...Your ancestors fled persecution elsewhere and ended up in Norway; My ancestors, in an earlier generation, fled Eastern Europe and Russia and ended up on the lower East Side of NYC.....Seems the Jews were always fleeing somewhere...very nice work, very well done...  
J. G.

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Irene, I have just finished reading your book and I think it's wonderful! What a warm, personal and totally engaging (although awfully sad) story. We understand a lot more about Norway as a result.  
E. W.

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It's hard not to sound trite, but Pick Potatoes is an extraordinary book. Congratulations!  
S. P.

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We have both finished reading..."We Are Going to Pick Potatoes." What a perfect title for your book! It was all so interesting; I was totally absorbed in it and learned so much about the Holocaust, your life in Sweden and Norway, and your family.  
L. P.

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Just finished your book and am appreciative of its fluidity, passionate expression, and disciplined research. I am raving about it to all my contacts as a must read. Good luck in New York. As my grandson would remark, the book is not a 10-it is definitely a 1,000!!!!!!  
D. R.

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I just finished "We are Going to Pick Potatoes." There is so much I want to say to you. First, I'm glad you have shared this particular view of the Holocaust with English-language readers... Second, even though I of course knew the general story and the "ending," your prose style drove the narrative like the best kind of suspense thriller. I had to keep reading to find out not only what was going to happen to these characters but, equally, to learn more about them and their relationships with each other and the world that was out of control around them. I know you are a brilliant translator but had no idea you were such a talented writer of original work. I have been proud to know you and count you as a friend. But now I'm almost speechless. What a gift you've given us with this story. Thank you so much.  
P. K.

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**Acclaim for Irene Berman's book talks**

On behalf of the President of Thanks to Scandinavia, Laurie Sprayregen and the Thanks to Scandinavia Board, we would like to thank you for the wonderful job you did at the Museum of Jewish Heritage event on Wednesday, April 14th.

Your beautifully told story is an invaluable contribution to the relatively unknown destiny of Norwegian Jews and we are truly grateful [to you] for making it available to us. We hope your book will be read by many and that it will be a source of reflection!

We had a very attentive audience, thanks to you, and we are very pleased with the positive feedback!

Thank you again for making the event a success! I have attached a beautiful photo taken at the reception.

With kind regards from all of us at TTS!

*Liv Tchividjian Grimsby*

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Irene, I am writing to tell you again about how wonderful your presentation was this past weekend. Many attendees approached me to tell me how much they enjoyed your presentation. You are a true scholar and an eloquent spokesperson for your cause. Everyone in attendance learned about the plight of Norwegian Jewry and the impact of the Holocaust on Scandinavian Jewish communities. Your lecture was as appropriate and compelling as any I might have chosen for the Shabbat prior to Yom HaShoah. I pray for your success as you work tirelessly to inform and to educate. I look forward to your return to the sanctuary of our congregation.

*Rabbi Yitzchok Adler, Beth David Synagogue*

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Wednesday evening, May 13, at the Town & County Club in Hartford was a very special event. There was not a place left for one more person in the dining room.

Your presentation and narration of the story of the Jews in Norway from 1940 to 1942 and post-wartime was both horrifying and poignant. One could have heard a pin drop as you described holding the family housekeeper's hand on the way from the playground as you thought you were all going to pick potatoes. You so vividly described the frantic efforts of your mother to gather her remaining family in the absence of your father who had barely escaped to neutral Sweden. Those who balked, who felt after all that they had done nothing wrong, were never heard from again.

It was fascinating to learn that for many years the loss of family members who had perished in the Holocaust was simply not discussed. From your vantage point as a child, your large family had shrunken considerably, and no one told you why. This long silence added years to the effort to uncover the truth that you pieced together for your book, *"We are Going to Pick Potatoes" Norway and the Holocaust, the Untold Story.*

Your story educated a largely non-Jewish audience about the plight of Jews in Norway and Denmark and the role Sweden played. Thank you for a most absorbing and memorable evening.

*Sally Richter, Dinner Event Chair, The Town & County Club*

## Upcoming Events with Irene Berman



Please check Irene Berman's website, <http://www.norwayandtheholocaust.com/>, for the most up-to-date information on her events and appearances.

## Past Events with Irene Berman

April 1, 2010—Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, University of Hartford, Hartford, CT

April 9, 2010—Yom Hashoah book event at Shabbat services, Beth David Synagogue, West Hartford, CT

April 14, 2010—Museum of Jewish Heritage in conjunction with Thanks to Scandinavia, in New York City.  
[http://www.mjhnyc.org/safrahall/visit\\_safra\\_27.htm#potatoes](http://www.mjhnyc.org/safrahall/visit_safra_27.htm#potatoes)

May 3, 2010—keynote speaker at Holocaust Award Recipient Dinner, The Maurice Greenberg Center, University of Hartford, Hartford, CT <http://www.hartford.edu/daily/Articles.asp?MainID=8511&Category=1>

May 12, 2010—dinner and book event at The Town and County Club, Hartford, CT

May 23, 2010—Jewish Book Council, New York, NY

May 26, 2010—book event at Temple Sholom, Greenwich, CT

August 24, 2010—book club talk in East Hampton, CT

September 21, 2010—Havurah Vatik group in Saratoga Springs, NY

October 13, 2010—Facing History event in Boston, MA

October 25, 2010—Holocaust Educator's Workshop, Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, University of Hartford

November 4, 2010—Brandeis University book talk

November 6, 2010—book signing at the U.S. Holocaust Center, Washington, D.C.

November 9, 2010—Kristallnacht event at the Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.

November 14, 2010—book talk at the Greater New Haven JCC, Woodbridge, CT

November 30, 2010—book talk at the San Francisco Jewish Community Library at the Bureau of Jewish Education, San Francisco, CA (<http://www.bjesf.org>)

December 1, 2010—Temple Beth Israel, San Francisco, CA

## Sample Photos from “*We Are Going to Pick Potatoes*”



Norwegian Jews at the docks in Oslo, Norway awaiting deportation following mass arrests.  
November 26, 1942.



Lea and Israel Steinfeld



Morten Steinfeld



Reidun Steinfeld

Irene Berman’s aunt, uncle, and cousins from Chapter Five, The Family that “Disappeared.”  
Thanks to Irene’s research, the unknown story of their lives has been preserved.

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