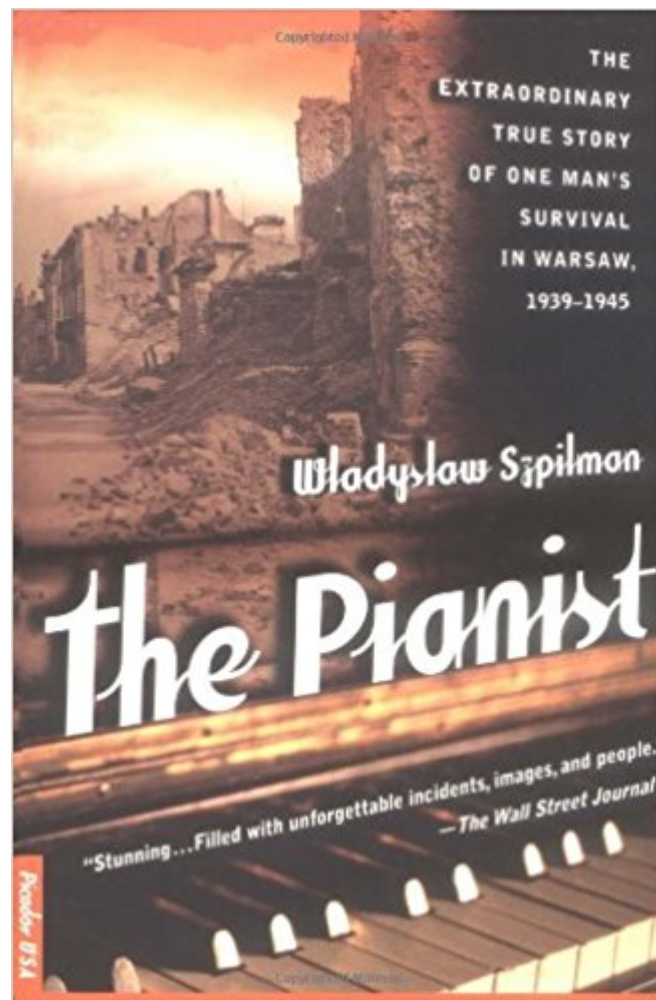




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# The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story Of One Man's Survival In Warsaw, 1939-1945



## Synopsis

Named one of the Best Books of 1999 by the Los Angeles Times, *The Pianist* is now a major motion picture directed by Roman Polanski and starring Adrien Brody (Son of Sam). *The Pianist* won the Cannes Film Festival's most prestigious prize—the Palme d'Or. On September 23, 1939, Wladyslaw Szpilman played Chopin's Nocturne in C-sharp minor live on the radio as shells exploded outside—so loudly that he couldn't hear his piano. It was the last live music broadcast from Warsaw: That day, a German bomb hit the station, and Polish Radio went off the air. Though he lost his entire family, Szpilman survived in hiding. In the end, his life was saved by a German officer who heard him play the same Chopin Nocturne on a piano found among the rubble. Written immediately after the war and suppressed for decades, *The Pianist* is a stunning testament to human endurance and the redemptive power of fellow feeling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Written immediately after the end of World War II, this morally complex Holocaust memoir is notable for its exact depiction of the grim details of life in Warsaw under the Nazi occupation. "Things you hardly noticed before took on enormous significance: a comfortable, solid armchair, the soothing look of a white-tiled stove," writes Wladyslaw Szpilman, a pianist for Polish radio when the Germans invaded. His mother's insistence on laying the table with clean linen for their midday meal, even as conditions for Jews worsened daily, makes palpable the Holocaust's abstract horror. Arbitrarily removed from the transport that took his family to certain death, Szpilman does not deny the "animal fear" that led him to seize this chance for escape, nor does he cheapen his emotions by belaboring

them. Yet his cool prose contains plenty of biting rage, mostly buried in scathing asides (a Jewish doctor spared consignment to "the most wonderful of all gas chambers," for example). Szpilman found compassion in unlikely people, including a German officer who brought food and warm clothing to his hiding place during the war's last days. Extracts from the officer's wartime diary (added to this new edition), with their expressions of outrage at his fellow soldiers' behavior, remind us to be wary of general condemnation of any group. --Wendy Smith --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Originally published in Poland in 1945 but then suppressed by the Communist authorities, this memoir of survival in the Warsaw Ghetto joins the ranks of Holocaust memoirs notable as much for their literary value as for their historical significance. Szpilman, a Jewish classical pianist, played the last live music broadcast from Warsaw before Polish Radio went off the air in September 1939 because of the German invasion. In a tone that is at once dispassionate and immediate, Szpilman relates the horrors of life inside the ghetto. But his book is distinguished by the dazzling clarity he brings to the banalities of ghetto life, especially the eerie normalcy of some social relations amid catastrophic upheaval. He shows how Jewish residents of the Polish capital adjusted to life under the occupation: "The armbands branding us as Jews did not bother us, because we were all wearing them, and after some time living in the ghetto I realized that I had become thoroughly used to them." Using a reporter's powers of description, Szpilman, who is still alive at the age of 88, records the chilling conversations that took place as Jews waited to be transported to their deaths. "We're not heroes!" he recalls his father saying. "We're perfectly ordinary people, which is why we prefer to risk hoping for that 10 per cent chance of living." In a twist that exemplifies how this book will make readers look again at a history they thought they knew, he details how a German captain saved his life. Employing language that has more in common with the understatement of Primo Levi than with the moral urgency of Elie Wiesel, Szpilman is a remarkably lucid observer and chronicler of how, while his family perished, he survived thanks to a combination of resourcefulness and chance. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Based on the evil history of this world due to war and hate, this read reminds us as a human race to be kind to each other as we press on. As it has been said over and over, men are all equal no matter what race, creed or religion they are. No one is superior to the other! Slavery and the Holocaust should be a never ending subject taught throughout the lives of everyone so that we

never forget and so that we learn from the mistakes of the past. Take care of one another, God and our Lord Jesus Christ is love.

If you cannot feel the pain or the confusion that this family and later it's only survivor dealt with during this time you have no heart. His music was his sanity, his trials of survival are so horrendous. We have nothing to compare with the exposure and cruel treatment that he endured. The old adage, I know how you feel cannot apply, we have no experience no parody to draw on that would be even slightly comparable. I had a friend in Phila, Joe at the Hot Spot .He had a number tatoored on his arm, he would not speak of it other than to say I was in Dachau, I wish others could have been as brave in exposing the carnage although to have done so was to relive those times. Mr. Szpilman was a hero, his love of music sustained him when all else failed him. Bravo, Mr. Szpilman, you are my hero and you have my eternal gratitude for your tenacity and being able to write those actions into our history. This book should have been required reading.

I read this excellent book, here in Brazil. This book is amazing. The author, a Polish Jew is hunted to be exterminated, by Nazis. And this happens for more than five years. All his family is murdered. He has famine and even tries the suicide, one time. About the Warsaw uprising, the author writes on page 186: "I was walking down a broad main road, once busy and full of traffic. There was not a single intact building as far as the eye could see. I kept having to walk round mountains of rubble, and was sometimes obliged to climb over them as if they were scree slopes." Again, on page 212, this book writes: "Numbers. More numbers. Of all three and a half Jews who once lived in Poland, two hundred and forty thousand survived the Nazi period. Anti-Semitism was flourishing long before the German invasion. Yet some three to four hundred thousand Poles risked their lives to save Jews. Of the sixteen thousand Aryans remembered in Yad Vashem, the central Jewish place of remembrance in Jerusalem, one third were Polish. Why work it out so accurately? Because everyone knows how horribly the infection of anti-Semitism traditionally raged among "the Poles", but few know that at the same time no other nation hid so many Jews from the Nazis. If you hid a Jew in France, the penalty was prison or a concentration camp, in Germany it cost you your life - but in Poland it cost the lives of your entire family."

The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw

1939-1945 Until The Pianist, I have never read a piece so moving that I had to bring it to the screen," declared the award-winning movie director Roman Polanski, himself a survivor of the

Krakow Jewish Ghetto, from which he escaped as a child after his mother's death. The story Polanski would make into an unforgettable film in 2002 is the war journal of the world-class pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman and his incredible tale of survival (*The Pianist*, Wladyslaw Szpilman, New York: Picador Press, 1999). Szpilman lived through the Nazi occupation of Poland between 1939-1945. His life was constantly in peril, and doubly so: both as a Jew and as a Pole. His family was rounded up in the Warsaw Ghetto and was liquidated along with its nearly half a million Jewish inhabitants, who were shot, died of disease or starvation, or were sent to concentration camps. (For more on this subject, see my earlier article on the Warsaw Ghetto, "Heroism in Hell": <http://literaturadeazi.ro/content/heroism-hell-resistance-warsaw-ghetto-uprising-israel-gutman>) Time after time Wladyslaw's intuition, luck, connections and resilience save him from a near-certain death. Although his brother, sisters and parents perished in the Treblinka death camp, the young man manages to survive thanks to the last-minute intervention from a friend who works for the Jewish Ghetto Police, who helps him right as he's about to board the cattle train to the concentration camp. To evade death yet again, Wladyslaw gets a work permit and becomes a slave laborer, along with the 50,000 working Jews (and their families) left in the Warsaw Ghetto, who, for a few more weeks or months, were still deemed "useful" by the Nazis. Later the young man becomes involved in the Jewish resistance movement in the ghetto, made up mostly of very courageous young men, who would rather die fighting than let the Nazis slaughter them like sheep. Right before the Nazis stomp out the rebellion, killing almost every last Jew and burning the ghetto to the ground, Wladyslaw yet again manages to miraculously escape by hiding with two Polish friends, the married couple Andrez and Janina Bogucki. Once their neighbor discovers him there, however, he is obliged to flee into an empty room with a piano, where he tries to recover from jaundice and malnutrition. When in the midst of the Polish resistance his apartment hit by bombs, he escapes from place to place in the stark and empty shell left of what was once the beautiful and prosperous city of Warsaw. Just as he believes he has cheated death and found a safer building that hadn't yet been destroyed, Wladyslaw runs into an elegant German officer. Had this man been a typical SS officer this would have meant certain death for the Jewish Pole. But in a twist of fate that seems to be the stuff fiction is made of, it so happens that this particular German officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, is a rare breed: a refined, humane man who hates the Nazi totalitarian regime and what it has done to Germany, to the Jewish people, and to the rest of the world. Wilm also adores classical music. Once he finds out that Wladyslaw is a musician, he asks him to play something on the grand piano. Szpilman chooses Chopin's Ballade in G Minor. When he hears this beautiful music, the German officer is not only convinced of

Wladyslaw's talent, he's also deeply moved by it. He returns several times to give the starving young man much-needed food provisions, without which he no doubt would have died. Germans have almost lost the war by the time of this fortuitous meeting between the German officer and the Polish Jew. In gratitude, Wladyslaw tells him his name, in case he's ever taken prisoner by the Poles or Russians and will need his help someday. In a twist of fate--and strange role reversal--when captured by the Red Army Wilm Hosenfeld mentions Szpilman's name to save his own life. Unfortunately, by the time the Wladyslaw learns of this fact, it's too late. The Soviet prisoner of war camp had already been abandoned. The most memorable aspects of *The Pianist*, for me, are its beautiful writing--this journal reads like a great novel--and its nuanced descriptions of life in the Warsaw Ghetto: the overcrowded and increasingly desperate, deplorable conditions, where "Half a million people had to find somewhere to lay their heads in an already over-populated part of the city, which scarcely had room for more than a hundred thousand" (59). Class hierarchies may have saved the richer inmates from the worst conditions for a while, but eventually almost everyone meets their death. Even the children of the orphanage are doomed. They go to their deaths with dignity, sheltered by their beloved leader, Janusz Korczak, from knowledge of their tragic fate: "The evacuation of the Jewish orphanage run by Janusz Korczak had been ordered that morning. The children were to have been taken away alone. He had the chance to save himself, and it was only with difficulty that he persuaded the Germans to take him too. He had spent long years of his life with children, and now, on this last journey, he would not leave them alone. He wanted to ease things for them. He told the orphans they were going out into the country, so they ought to be cheerful. At last they would be able to exchange the horrible, suffocating city walls for meadows of flowers, streams where they could bathe, woods full of berries and mushrooms. He told them to wear their best clothes, and so they came out into the yard, two by two nicely dressed and in a happy mood. The little column was led by an SS man who loved children, as Germans do, even those he was about to see on their way into the next world" (95-96). Claudia Moscovici, Literature Salon

I've read many books about the Holocaust and living conditions during World War II, but this one is something different. While it is an actual account of one man's experience in the Warsaw ghettos and hiding from the Germans, it is written in a way that flows, is easy to read, and is captivating as you learn how brutal and dangerous life was during the war. The author had an uncanny knack for survival despite the horrors surrounding him. It's a heart wrenching read to know this is a true life story, written to document the experience and not to embellish the events for dramatic effect. It's

amazing to me that survived and shared his story with us.

What a wonderful read but such a sad sad story. It saddens me every time I read about the Jews being persecuted the way they were. This story was well told and I enjoyed reading it It is so sad that so many people had to sudden and die.

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