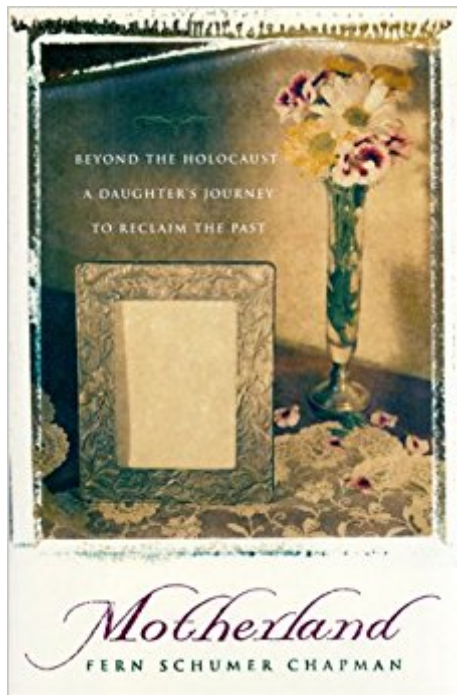




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# Motherland: A Daughter's Journey To Reclaim Her Past



## Synopsis

A poignant mother-daughter journey explores the afterlife of the Holocaust in a story of love, loss, and the persistence of memory. In 1938, just before they were killed by the Nazis, Freida and Siegmund Westerfeld sent their twelve-year-old daughter Edith to live with relatives in Chicago. Edith escaped the death camps but was left profoundly adrift, cut off from culture, tradition, her entire identity. For decades she shut away her memories, until she realized that the void of her past was consuming her and her family. Then, with her daughter Fern Schumer Chapman--herself a pregnant mother--Edith returned to Germany. For Edith the trip was an act of courage, a chance to reconnect with her homeland and reconcile with her past. For Fern it was a miraculous opening, a break in the wall of silence surrounding her mother's past... and her mother. A memoir as lyrical as a novel, *Motherland* is the narrative of a personal transformation that examines the legacy of war. It is the story of learning to live with the past, of remembering and honoring while looking forward and letting go. In the tradition of Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*, *Motherland* probes a pain that shatters nations, divides generations, and outlives its perpetrators. A riveting read, *Motherland* echoes Ursula Hegi's *Stones from the River*. It is a loving yet harrowing story of mothers and daughters; of expectations and limitations; of roots, reunion, and ultimately understanding.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When asked to accompany her mother on a return visit to her native Germany, Chapman jumped at the opportunity. At stake was a chance to reclaim both her ancestors and her own mother, Edith, whose past as a Holocaust escapee had created an emotional barrier between the two of them.

"She lost her childhood to the war," Chapman writes tenderly, "and, in a way, I lost my childhood to her." In 1938, at the age of 12, Edith's parents sent her from Stockstadt am Rhein to live in Chicago with relatives who treated her badly. Chapman, a former Chicago Tribune reporter, lovingly describes her scarred mother's decision to return to her hometown; the emotional catharsis and peace her return brings; and the various reactions her return engenders in the townspeople. (Some old classmates throw Edith a party, but others will not look at her.) Chapman's narrative is strongest when she writes as journalist rather than memoirist, letting the Germans speak for themselves. She introduces two gripping individuals: the town historian, Hans, who lives in remorse and humiliation because he failed to help Edith's mother; and Mina, Edith's family's maid and soul-sister, whose defiance and hatred of the Nazis raged in her until her death. Although at times Chapman's prose seems too sentimental, her report of a German town's reactions to a Holocaust survivor's return is moving and engrossing. (Apr.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Although people of the Jewish faith honor their ancestors by remembering their history, Edith Westerfeld chose to bury her past in order to survive the present. Westerfeld did not experience the Nazi concentration camps firsthand, but she still suffered because of them. In 1938, her parents sent her from Germany to Chicago so that she could escape those atrocities. While this guaranteed Edith's survival, her parents and grandparents perished. Fifty-two years later, Westerfeld decided that she was finally able to reconcile the past by visiting her homeland. Her daughter, former Chicago Tribune reporter Chapman, accompanied her, and for Chapman the journey was also a chance to learn about the ancestors she never knew. This well-written and moving book detailing their trip shows how the Holocaust affected not only the survivors of the war but the next generation as well. Recommended for all public libraries and for academic libraries with large Holocaust collections.-Jill Jaracz, MLIS, Chicago Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Motherland is the story of Fern Schumer Chapman and her mother Edith Westerveld and their trip back to Germany in 1990. Edith Westerveld was 12 years old in 1938 when her parents sent her to the United States to get away from the worsening situation for the Jews of Germany. Her older sister Betty had already been sent to the United States the year before. Edith had never dealt with having to leave her family, but in 1990 she and her daughter made the trip, I think mostly to come to terms with her past and to try and heal from it. I think she also felt the trip would help her relationship with her daughter which had always been difficult. Much of the book is basically an explanation of how the war affected Edith, and as a result, how it continued to affect Fern too. In a

way, this was kind of a psychological book, but also a mystery with lots of secrets beneath the surface. I personally love books like this, because reading about the relationship between mother and daughter helps me understand the relationship between myself and my own mother. Sadly, most of Edith's family perished in the Holocaust, but the trip did help the relationship with her daughter and also helped her relationship with her brand new granddaughter. This was definitely a five star book for me, I wish the book was a bit longer.

I believe that this book is a much needed story so that we never forget those lost in the Holocaust and those who survived. I know some survivors and their story needs to continue to be told in fiction and non-fiction. Motherland Beyond the Holocaust is a book which is totally plausible in the history and the relationship of different generations . Leo Bretholz died this week , his mission was to make sure that people never forget and never repeat the history of the Holocaust. Fern Schumer Chapman should be commended for a book of this quality . I will never forget....

Fern Schumer tells a lovely story that will ring true for all who read it.

I had begun this book and put it down--to pick it up again was a very good idea. This author has a very readable style. A great book to read if you want to know about the Holocaust and beyond--just like the title says--it says it all.

I read this for our book club. It was good, but I have read others that I have enjoyed more. I'm not sure enjoyed is quite the correct word when speaking of the Holocaust. I have read others that have been more intense as far as the way it is written and more detailed with relationships, etc.

I had seen the story of the author's Mother on a tv show called Lost and Found. It touched my heart, so I set out to find the books about this woman. BEAUTIFULLY written story..... Should be a MUST READ in every High School class studying the Holocaust!

A novel that seems a bit impersonal considering the subject it involved. The mother went back to her childhood that ended up a horror for the entire family

Interesting perspective on Jewish pre WWII refugees returning to Germany, especially if you have read *Is It Night or Day* by the same author.

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