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Three Minutes In Poland: Discovering A Lost World In A 1938 Family Film



Synopsis

Named one of the best books of 2014 by NPR, The New Yorker, and The Boston GlobeWhen Glenn Kurtz stumbles upon an old family film in his parents' closet in Florida, he has no inkling of its historical significance or of the impact it will have on his life. The film, shot long ago by his grandfather on a sightseeing trip to Europe, includes shaky footage of Paris and the Swiss Alps, with someone inevitably waving at the camera. Astonishingly, David Kurtz also captured on color 16mm film the only known moving images of the thriving, predominantly Jewish town of Nasielsk, Poland, shortly before the community's destruction. "Blissfully unaware of the catastrophe that lay just ahead," he just happened to visit his birthplace in 1938, a year before the Nazi occupation. Of the town's three thousand Jewish inhabitants, fewer than one hundred would survive. Glenn Kurtz quickly recognizes the brief footage as a crucial link in a lost history. "The longer I spent with my grandfather's film," he writes, "the richer and more fragmentary its images became." Every image, every face, was a mystery that might be solved. Soon he is swept up in a remarkable journey to learn everything he can about these people. After restoring the film, which had shrunk and propelled across the United States; to Canada, England, Poland, and Israel; and into archives, basements, cemeteries, and even an irrigation ditch at an abandoned Luftwaffe airfield as he looks for shards of Nasielsk's Jewish history. One day, Kurtz hears from a young woman who had watched the video on the Holocaust Museum's website. As the camera panned across the faces of children, she recognized her grandfather as a thirteen-year-old boy. Moszek Tuchendler of Nasielsk was now eighty-six-year-old Maurice Chandler of Florida, and when Kurtz meets him, the lost history of Nasielsk comes into view. Chandler's laser-sharp recollections create a bridge between two worlds, and he helps Kurtz eventually locate six more survivors, including a ninety-six-year-old woman who also appears in the film, standing next to the man she would later marry. Painstakingly assembled from interviews, photographs, documents, and artifacts, *Three Minutes in Poland* tells the rich, harrowing, and surprisingly intertwined stories of these seven survivors and their Polish hometown. "I began to catch fleeting glimpses of the living town," Kurtz writes, "a cruelly narrow sample of its relationships, contradictions, scandals." Originally a travel souvenir, David Kurtz's home movie became the most important record of a vibrant town on the brink of extinction. From this brief film, Glenn Kurtz creates a poignant yet unsentimental exploration of memory, loss, and improbable survival--a monument to a lost world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Kurtz’s quest to learn about the lost world depicted in his grandfather’s home movie is at the heart of this deeply moving, gorgeously written book.”
—Kate Tuttle, *The Boston Globe*
“[An] expansive, beautifully rendered micro-history. . . . In the pages of Glenn Kurtz’s marvelous book, the ghosts from those three minutes are breathtakingly brought to life.”
—Louise Steinman, *Los Angeles Times*
“An impressive feat of historical research In a genre so often preoccupied with the recitation of horrors, *Three Minutes in Poland* is the rare work that seems more about people than about ghosts.”
—Sarah Kaplan, *The Washington Post*
“In this captivating book, Mr. Kurtz tries to reconstruct Jewish Nasielsk, knowing he will fail—not only because he arrives too late but because memory is by nature incomplete.”
—Dara Horn, *The Wall Street Journal*
“Three Minutes in Poland—along with the remarkable four-year quest it documents—is an act of reverence, as well as a feat of archival reconstruction. Kurtz’s patience, energy and appetite for detail seem boundless, and they gradually bring a community—a microcosm of Polish Jewry, with all its political and religious factions and class divisions—(almost) to life The book accumulates elegiac power *Three Minutes in Poland* describes with horrifying precision the ordeals that preceded the murders of most of Nasielsk’s Jewish community. But equally compelling pages document how Chandler, with guile, luck and some Polish help, escapes the Warsaw ghetto, took a non-Jewish Polish identity and managed to survive.”
—Julia Klein, *The Chicago Tribune*
“Kurtz weaves . . . a haunting web of contingency.”
—The New Yorker
“Kurtz’s tenacious research and sensitive reporting make this book a gem.”
—The Christian Science Monitor
“The 10 best books of November”
“Engrossing, exhaustively researched.”

Ã¢ ª Jessica Zack, San Francisco ChronicleÃ¢ ª “A rare glimpse of a lost world.”Ã¢ ª
Ã¢ ª Moment magazineÃ¢ ª “A pilgrimage of the highest order.”Ã¢ ª • Ã¢ ª ª Elaine Margolin, Jewish JournalÃ¢ ª “Three Minutes in Poland begins as the story of an old family film rediscovered and veers into an important tale of Polish shtetls during World War II. It is intensely moving and brilliantly researched, and it reads like a thriller.”Ã¢ ª • Ã¢ ª ª Elie Wiesel, author of NightÃ¢ ª “A masterpiece. With scrupulous intelligence and deep compassion, Glenn Kurtz tells this stupendous, terrifying, and ultimately consoling story in a way that fully honors the material. The reader grieves for what was lost, but is also alert to the miracle that anything was saved at all. Kurtz has done us all a great service in rescuing this tale from oblivion. Three Minutes In Poland is destined to be a classic.”Ã¢ ª • Ã¢ ª ª Teju Cole, author of Open CityÃ¢ ª “Glenn Kurtz’s beautifully written book is many things at once: a family memoir, a page-turning mystery, a penetrating look at one of the darkest chapters in human history. Above all, it’s a powerful testament to the singular worth of every life. That’s the passion that inspired Kurtz through his years of research, and I can’t think of a worthier one.”Ã¢ ª • Ã¢ ª ª Rebecca Goldstein, author of MazelÃ¢ ª “Glenn Kurtz leads the reader on an inspiring journey through the forgotten past in this meticulous work of historical reconstruction. I was amazed by the patient, forensic skill with which he followed the trail of a handful of images into a vibrant array of voices and visual memories. By helping his many interview subjects remember details of a world they themselves didn’t know they still carried inside, Kurtz discovers life where there had seemed only to be loss.”Ã¢ ª •
Ã¢ ª ª George Prochnik, author of The Impossible ExileÃ¢ ª “With nothing more to go on than three scant minutes in a family film, Glenn Kurtz has meticulously pieced together a luminous, searing story of a place and its people. I read this beautiful book wishing for nothing less than to turn back the clock and change the course of history. Kurtz is a restrained and elegant writer, and Three Minutes in Poland is not only a magnificent literary achievement, but a human one.”Ã¢ ª •
Ã¢ ª ª Dani Shapiro, author of Devotion

Glenn Kurtz is the author of *Practicing: A Musician’s Return to Music* and the host of *Conversations on Practice*, a series of public conversations about writing held at McNally Jackson Books in New York City.

“Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering the lost world in a 1938 family film.” by Glenn Kurtz. An excellent read ‘who were they...and what happened to them?’ kind of book. The book traces the inquiry of Glenn Kurtz into the origins of the people in an old family film taken by his Grandparents

on a trip to eastern Poland in 1938. The author takes us on a journey that involves his Grandparents who made a trip to eastern Poland in 1938 to visit their ancestral home they left in the 1800's, an old film that needs restored for the Holocaust Memorial because it shows life in a Jewish village that was destroyed in WWII, the process used to restore that film that was extremely interesting, and his journey to find out who the people were that leads down many different paths. It gives a good background of his family, Jewish family life at the time, what Jewish village life was like prior to WWII, the religious traditions involved, that of the region he is examining in eastern Poland, the history of the region, the small village his Grandparents take photos of that one of his Grandparents was born in. It also involves the impact the occupation of Poland had on the Jewish population. So the search begins for the people in the photos and where they are at today? It is a fast read, that keeps the reader engrossed in finding out the answers. The only argument I have against the book, which is why I only gave it four stars, it often gets tedious near the end with all the (what appears to be) extra people that are being brought into the story. It gets to the point of being confusing as to who is who and what relationship they have to the story? But, I realize that's just my opinion. Otherwise it is a good book. The title in itself is what drew me to the book. It turned out to be money well spent, one of the better books I have read recently.

A fascinating book. Especially if you appreciate facts that are facts and mindful methodology. It takes you through his whole trip and he admits when and why at times he was wrong. He had a passion which he followed in a valid way, unemotional. There is much to be learned about WW2 and about resources.

Unbelievable true but very sad detailed story regarding a family home movie of a 1938 visit to Nasielsk, Poland that was found after 50+ years of storage but was still able to be saved by extensive efforts of the author, detailing the shtetl life of the Jewish inhabitants who the majority of which would be victims of the Holocaust.

This is a fascinating book on a village near Warsaw that had a large Jewish population prior to the September 1939 Nazi conquest. It took a 3 minute segment of a movie made in 1938 by the grandparents of the author who attempted to trace the fate of the people in the film and create a vision of the town and its inhabitants. He was able to find several of the few who survived the Holocaust as well as determine how many of the victims perished. It is a story of individuals and families that goes beyond numbers. At times, it is difficult, but necessary, to read because of the

horrific treatment of the Jews in their often futile attempt to go on living.

Fascinating glimpse into film preservation, this book really got me thinking about the way we perceive history and the way we should take stock of our present. Fantastic book. Just what I wanted. A lovely historical, biographical, non-fiction survival story with a mystery element. Inspirational, poignant, educational and at times even humorous. Filled with beautiful photographs, this is a true book of substance. I wasn't 20 pages in before I bought another copy for my cousin, and told everyone at work to get a copy. The book gives a link to the discussion-guide which is also great.

Fascinating unraveling of a mystery 3 minute video film from 1938 vacation trip to Poland by the authors Grandfather. It details life in the village, the destruction/mass murder of Jewish life during World War 2 and then how the few displaced survivors returned to some semblance of life....who come forward to tell this story. Very moving, very informative.

Very Interesting Premise. As the story unfold, the family & friends trees become difficult to remember because the number of names involved. There is, perhaps, a little too much detail & repetition. Parts should have been edited out. But, it's definitely worth a try.

An unbelievable story of Polish occupation like you have never heard it told. Luck and coincidence and descendants who will not forget those they love combine to make this book quite a read. In this book some people survive to tell the story, I can only imagine the number of people and cities lost forever. Thanks to this author in combination with the help of many others looking for lost families and towns, you get a picture of life in these times,

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