



# A Hidden Life: A Memoir of August 1969

*Johanna Reiss*

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For years, Johanna Reiss' American husband, Jim, encouraged her to return to Holland to chronicle the two years, seven months, and one day she had spent hiding from the Nazis in rural Usselo, Holland. In 1969, she finally made the trip.

Accompanied by Jim and their two young children, Reiss intended to spend seven weeks researching the book that would eventually become *The Upstairs Room*, her Newbery Honor-winning account of her time hiding in the attic of a farmhouse in which for a time a contingent of Nazi soldiers was billeted.

But unknown to the millions of people who went on to read her beloved classic, behind the dark and painful story of the book was a still darker tale: Reiss' husband returned to America early and committed suicide at age thirty-seven, leaving no note.

For Reiss, an ongoing reckoning with universal tragedy becomes particular: she is forced to reckon, too, with Jim's death—and explain it to her children. Subtle and disturbing, the book is a powerful consideration of memory, violence, and loss, told in a stunning and sparse narrative style.

**Johanna Reiss** is the author of the classic young adult title *The Upstairs Room*, which Elie Wiesel praised in *The New York Times Book Review* as an “admirable account . . . as important in every respect as the one bequeathed to us by Anne Frank.” She is the winner of the Newbery Honor, the Jewish Book Council Children's Book Award, and the Buxtehuder Bulle. She lives in New York City.

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