

BOOK REVIEW

Fighting Back, A Memoir of Jewish Resistance in World War II

By Donna Sievers

I just made French onion soup and as I was putting it in the refrigerator, I realized how many bits of food such as plastic bags full of wilted lettuce and leftovers I had in the refrigerator. What a luxury to know that I can not only go to the store and buy more, but that I should feel no shame in throwing out perfectly good food because I let it go a few days past its prime. But I do feel shame and feel badly about wasting food. I can still hear my father telling us that there were starving children in Biafra and that we should not waste the food we put on our plate. Food is a precious commodity and I am committing to waste less.

I am also reading a wonderful book entitled *Fighting Back, A Memoir of Jewish Resistance in World War II* by Harold Werner. Food plays an important role in the story of a small number of Jewish resistance partisans who left the ghettos while the Nazis enacted the “final solution,” which was to murder the Jewish population. They escaped to the dense forests in Poland and survived in the woods during the harsh winters with German soldiers hunting them down. The partisans would sneak back into the ghetto and smuggle out as many people as they could, and the number of Jewish partisans in the forests grew. As I read the book, I could not imagine what fortitude, self-sacrifice, heroism, and resolve these partisans showed in trying to save their own lives and the lives of other Jews.

When I was a history major in college, I did learn of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising but I always questioned why more of the local population and the Jewish victims could not have done more to resist the Nazis. How naïve of me to question a group of humans who were hunted down, starved, de-humanized, and sent off to their death. What did I know of such horrors and hardship?

In reading *Fighting Back, A Memoir of Jewish Resistance in World War II*, I found that there was indeed a heroic group of young and old Jewish men and women who literally “fought back.” How they organized and led partisan operations against the Nazis and Nazi sympathizers was quite astonishing. The Jewish partisans often led large-scale military actions against the German invaders of Poland. It is a powerful story.

The partisans in the forests were desperate for food. They sometimes stole a chicken but most often were given food by the local villagers. Feeding the group, which could number from 20 to 400 people, was a daily challenge, as was hiding from the Nazis. How can I throw away food when it is still a daily challenge for so many in the world? I must do better!

Perhaps you will join me in planning, shopping, and food preparation so that we do not waste food. I hope so. I hope you might also read *Fighting Back, A Memoir of Jewish Resistance in World War II*. I found my used copy on Amazon. So back to the onion soup. We have eaten some, frozen some, and took some to a friend who is house-bound. No more wasting at my house.



Donna Sievers was raised in Long Beach and taught at Stanford Junior High, Bolsa Grande High, Pacifica High, and CSULB before leaving the classroom for administrator duties in Garden Grove USD. She and her husband live in Bluff Heights, where their retirement activities include volunteering for the Joyful Child Foundation in Memory of Samantha Runnion, gardening at the Bembridge House, bike riding, walking to the ocean, and maintaining a 107-year-old house and garden.