



Gift of Darkness: Growing Up in Occupied Amsterdam

Craig K. Comstock

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"Gift of Darkness" tells the story of a boy who, like Anne Frank, lived in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. Unlike Anne, he was not taken into early hiding, but was able to move around the city, even to help serve its Jewish community, and observe first-hand the ominous things that were happening.

Robbert Van Santen lived each day not knowing how or when the war would end, not being sure that he would survive, not imagining that as an elder he would articulate his experiences to an American author.

To put one of Mary Oliver's poetic phrases in a new context, his story is "a box full of darkness," but in the telling he offers the author and the reader the gift of stepping into his shoes and thus the satisfaction of coming to understand a teenager's challenging life.

What did Robbert do afterward? He sought "to find joy in life despite what happened. Not instead of the memories, but as a response to them."

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