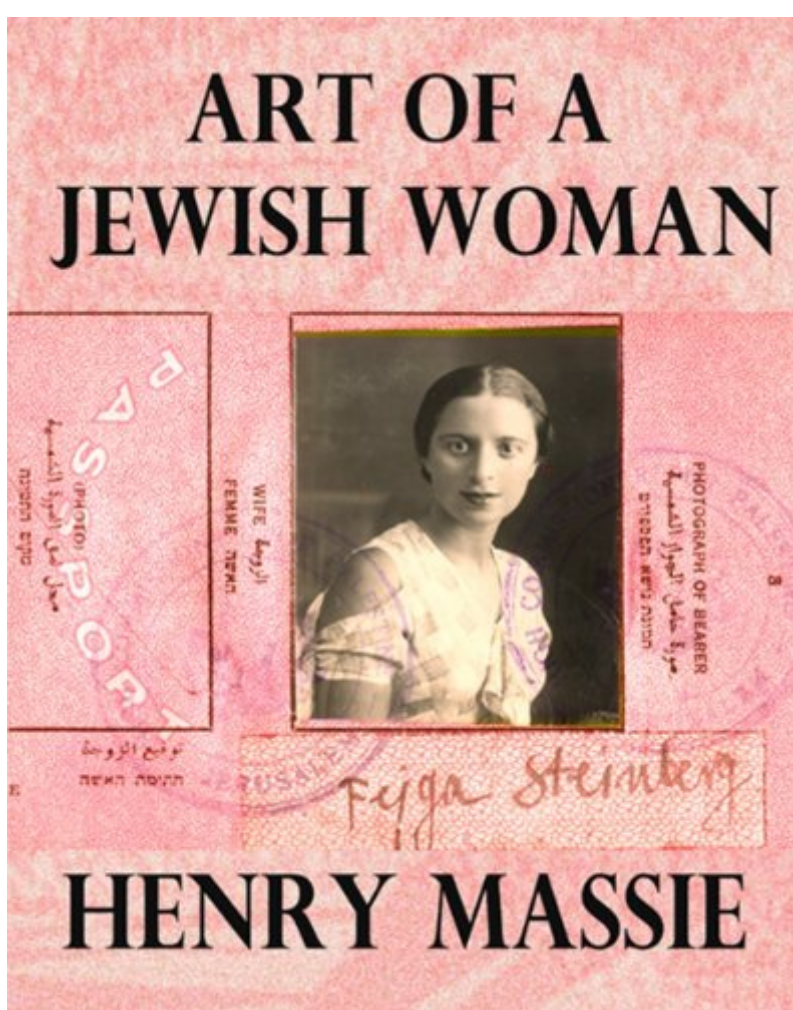


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# Art Of A Jewish Woman: The True Story Of How A Penniless Holocaust Escapee Became An Influential Modern Art Connoisseur (formerly Titled Felice's Worlds)



## Synopsis

First she escaped the Holocaust and the poverty of the shtetl. After that, she moved in many worlds. And in every one she made her mark."Henry Massie never blinks as he creates an astonishing chronicle of a life in diaspora. Only a son could capture this passionate spirit, who escaped both Adolf Hitler and Joe McCarthy." -Patty Friedmann, author of *Too Jewish* *Art of a Jewish Woman* is a memoir and biography of Massie's mother, a brilliant and beautiful woman who escaped the Holocaust and participated in many of the most critical periods of the 20th Century. One part historical biography, weaving World War II era European cultural relationships with the history of Modern Art, and one part inspirational romance, it paints a vivid portrait of Felice as an indomitable spirit, her boldness and resilience a beacon of hope. "The most clear expose on the Holocaust and European history that I've read outside of text books ... A mesmerizing, rare and unforgettable read." -A Bookish Libraria "A biography that chronicles an amazing life ... Vivid rather than stuffy." -A Universe in Words

From the author: I had listened to my mother's tales all my life and wanted to share them. She was an escapee from a Polish shtetl wiped out by the Nazis, a high-school political activist in Lithuania, a university student in France who lost her first love tragically, a partisan for Arab-Jewish co-existence in Palestine who was caught in the first intifada in 1936, and a penniless arrival to America in 1937. Yet when she died she had amassed one of the most important collections of Modern Art in the world and was a university lecturer on the subject. When she was lecturing on modern art at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, young women flocked to her. She advised them on their love-life and mentored them in their education. She never spoke of the Feminist movement, however one of her college students said height of feminism in the 1970s, "She was the quintessential modern woman. That short hair [like Audrey Hepburn's], those clothes [colorful folkloric during the day, black skirt to the knee with a black top in the evening], that lovely petite body with the big brown eyes. She was alive, forceful, independent and challenging." In writing about her, I understood for the first time how her experience of losing loved ones to the Nazis had been passed on to her American son. But as a psychiatrist, I was drawn to Felice's story because it shows so much resilience in the face of terrible emotional trauma. Her life dramatizes how just keeping on through days of having nothing but a belief that "someday I will have something," can be a powerful survival tool.

Excerpt: Inside the stone building, a British officer examined passenger's travel documents. When Felice's turn came, the crisply uniformed colonel looked at her bare shoulders and her short beige and cream linen dress. A marriage certificate issued the day before by a rabbi in Beirut said they were husband and wife. The man looked malnourished. He had a red beard and long ear-locks, and large spectacles covered his face. His

black suit was all dusty, and his head was covered with a large Hassidic black fedora. The couple did not speak to each other. The colonel was under orders to do his part at the border to stop the flow of illegal immigrants into Palestine. He asked Felice first in English, which she didn't know, then in French, "Are the two of you married?" "Yes, of course," she answered him. "What language do you have in common?" he continued, probing the ruse. But Felice and her newly certificated husband had no language in common. He spoke Arabic and Hebrew, and she Polish, French, German, Yiddish, and some Russian. "The Language of love," she said in perfect melodious French, not missing a beat, flirting with the colonel. He stamped her entry visa.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is an engaging book about a fascinating woman. It's a biography as told by her son which offers readers a new way of thinking about the idea of "holocaust survivor" and how trauma reverberates from one generation to another. The narrative moves along briskly, taking us from France to Palestine to Poland to America as we follow Felice's escape from the war zones of the 20th century. The narrative is restrained but honest and insightful, giving us a portrait of a woman

who is both admirable and troubled, indomitable and damaged. And it shows a son who comes to understand more about both his mother and himself in the process of telling her story.

As a young girl in WWII Poland, Felice faced almost certain death until she was able to emigrate to Palestine. Leaving her first love behind, she traveled from country to country, searching for a home. Her journey, both physical and emotional, is the basis of Felice's *Worlds*. Dr. Henry Massie tells his mother's story as only a son could tell it. These are the stories that he heard his entire life. Her journey is a fascinating story. However, the writing style is a bit dry. It reads more like an academic paper than as a biography. I found it interesting that, as an adult, a Holocaust survivor heard him tell his mother's story and told him that he had the emotional distance of a survivor. His writing has the same detachment, which makes for a difficult reading experience. However, her story is an interesting one and deserves to be told. 3 stars

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the Pump Up Your Book book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Both in the way that it describes Judaism and Islam along with the history of both is very poorly researched. There is no way that she could have gone to the school in Warsaw and known so little about Judaism, unless she were not a Jew. Mohammad did NOT receive the Koran on the Temple Mount. Jerusalem is never even mentioned in the Koran. Even as a work of fiction the research is very poorly done. No Muslim male child would stand to watch a woman wash, he would always turn away. There are fallacies on fallacies in this book, and it paints a distorted picture. By the way Orthodox Jewish women do not shave their heads rather they keep their heads covered, so that only their husbands delight in their hair.

Some reviewers have already pointed out that the writer has used a more academic style which makes it dry and boring. A good editor would have helped considerably. The ordering of the story was also very odd - sort of doubling back on itself. I found it exceptionally hard to finish. The section on art was very odd - and I found completely unintelligible. It also felt that there was some personal agenda here that was never explicitly stated. This is not about someone who personally survived the holocaust as she was already in the States. I could not recommend this book on any level.

Henry Massie's *Felice's Worlds* is an amazing book about his amazing mother, the first university-educated woman from her region in Poland, fast-talking and witty. She evaded the Holocaust, passed through Palestine in the 1930s, and ended up in St. Louis as a leading collector of abstract expressionist art. This story is so much more than a) a loving memoir of a delightfully eccentric mother or b) an account of yet another refugee from the Nazi horror. She lived through and in, as Dr. Massie says in his video trailer for the book, the most frightening and exciting times in recent history. This is very much a book for the general reader and not merely for those interested in European Jewish life around the time of the Second World War. Anyone curious about modern art, or the Twentieth Century in general, not to mention those who like damn good writing, will find *Felice's Worlds* a rare treat.

This book was a huge disappointment that I wish I had my \$2.99 back! It started out very promising, Felice has lived a fascinating life. But I quickly got sick of the continual efforts by the author to shove socialism down my throat. Socialism will never work as long as humans are greedy. Felice is a hypocrite, she rants about the evils of capitalism while enjoying a life of excess. Why not feed the poor Felice? Well, that doesn't fit in with the life she wants to lead. The author also tends to repeat himself over and over, which is very annoying. The second half of this book is nothing but name dropping of modern artists and how everyone loved Felice. Felice is such a selfish, narcissistic woman who disgusted me more and more as the book went on. If you want to read a book about a woman of faith surviving the Holocaust, keep looking this book is not for you. If you want to learn to be an egotistical manipulative socialist, then buy this book!

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