

# Régine Miller

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• Walter Buchignani •

*Résumé:* Walter Buchignani relate les événements et les rencontres qui sont à l'origine de son oeuvre *Tell No One Who You Are*, qui raconte l'histoire de Régine Miller, une enfant qui a vécu dans la clandestinité durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

*Summary:* Walter Buchignani here offers an account of the events and meetings that led to his publication of *Tell No One Who You Are*, the story of Régine Miller, a hidden child of the Holocaust.

I'm often asked how I came to write about the Holocaust, and I understand the curiosity: I'm not Jewish, I was born twenty years after the end of World War II, and I have no connection to that period in history, except for a few courses I took at university. So how do I fit in?

Maybe I don't, but I like to remind people of what Steven Spielberg said about his own Holocaust project: My film *Schindlers List*, he said, is no more a Jewish story or German story than it is a human story. It's simply about racial hatred. The more we know about each other, the less there will be opportunity for hatred.

In the same way, *Tell No One Who You Are* is not simply a story about a hidden child of the Holocaust. It, too, is foremost a human story about racial hatred. The underlying message is about the need for tolerance, understanding and co-operation. What better way to underscore that message than to have an author and subject with so little in common?

That's not to say the distance between Régine Miller and myself did not pose any problems. It did. The project was difficult for both of us, for different reasons. I had to try to make sense of events about which I had little understanding and that took place 20 years before I was born. Régine had to relive in memory what no one should have to live in the first place, especially not at the age of ten.

I met Régine while on assignment for *The Gazette* in Montreal. I was to

write an article on a group of Montrealers who were preparing to attend a Holocaust conference in New York in May, 1991. The conference drew 1,600 people from 28 countries, including Régine.

The conference was the first international gathering of so-called hidden children — Jewish kids in Europe who hid from the Nazis during World War II. Some of these children hid in attics and basements and woods; others took on false names and were placed in Catholic convents and homes by parents who later perished in Nazi camps.

I arranged to speak to a handful of these hidden children — now in their 50s and 60s — from the Montreal group. The first was Régine, and I found her story so powerful that I ended up devoting the entire *Gazette* article to her alone.

Telling Régine's story in 1,500 words was not easy. It deserved more room. And like many journalists, I'd always wanted to write a book. A call from Tundra Books, who expressed interest in Régine's story after seeing it in *The Gazette*, led to the writing of *Tell No One Who You Are*.

We began with an initial set of interviews at her home over a few weeks, and this allowed me to work out a skeleton of the book. After that, I began to work chapter by chapter — elaborating and filling in gaps as the interviews became more specific and Régine's memories sharper.

The problem of distance was overcome by making sure every draft went back to Régine for corrections. This not only ensured accuracy but had another unexpected benefit: Watching the story unfold on paper a little at a time helped Régine remember details that until then she simply could not.

Today, Régine lives in Montreal, where I first met her while on assignment for *The Gazette*. Since the publishing of *Tell No One*, she has returned to Belgium to visit some of the places described in the book, including the home that served as her last hiding place more than fifty years before.

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*Walter Buchignani is the author of Tell No One Who You Are.*