

**Reader's Group Guide to
FATE DID NOT LET ME GO
A Mother's Farewell Letter**

This guide was created to help the reading group members process their own thoughts and feelings about the Holocaust. This guide is based on the inspiring story of Valli Ollendorff and her timeless letter to her son Ulrich.

The story teaches readers about history, strength in the face of hardship, fate, values, love, honor, and courage. The impact of the letter and its expression of love transcends time and is a vessel of great lessons in love for those who read it.

Discussion Questions

1. Anne, Ulrich, and their newborn son, Stephen, left Berlin the day after the Kristalnacht, or as it is commonly referred to in English, the "Night of Broken Glass." Why is it called the "Night of Broken Glass"?
2. In addition to being a story about the Holocaust, how is this also a story about immigrants and the immigrant experience?
3. What does the Ollendorff story teach you about the value of family? About bonds and connection?
4. What did you learn about Valli through her letter? Were you able to determine her values and what she believed to be important in life?
5. Why do you think Valli still referred to her adult son as her "boy" in the letter? What do you think that meant to her? What does it mean to you?
6. If you were to rewrite this story in present day, how might it be different?
7. Would this letter have been as powerful if it was an e-mail? Why or why not?
8. The letter reached Ulrich forty-three years after the death of his mother. If the letter had reached Ulrich within a few weeks of his mother's death, how would the impact have been different?
9. Where do you imagine the letter was all of those years?
10. Valli's letter is a farewell letter; it is full of love, hope, and dignity. Describe a time when you have had to write a letter to someone that was written to instill hope, support, and to communicate your love and dreams for the future.
11. Pretend that you are Valli's son and you have received the letter soon after your mother wrote it. Describe what would you write back to her?
12. Can you relate aspects of Valli's situation to modern situations -- like a family being torn apart by war, divorce, racism, etc.? How are the situations different and how are they the same?
13. Think about how you would like to be remembered -- what messages would you leave and what acts would you do before you die?
14. Define for yourself the meaning of honor, courage, and tolerance. What do each of these words mean to you? Think of ways that you can incorporate more of these actions into your everyday life.
15. What does the letter from Valli say about the power of written communication?
16. There are many symbols that reflect both the Jewish faith and the horror of the Holocaust. While some symbols reflect the love and hope of the Jewish race (like the Star of David) this same

symbol was used to mark the Jewish people for death and punishment. There would have been so many ways to "mark" the Jewish people; why do you suppose the Star of David was chosen? How have other symbols marked people through history?



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POPE JOHN PAUL II**

QUOTES FROM www.fatedidnotletmego.org

“This is a letter of hope that affirms the dignity of all human beings. The letter captures her faith and that there is a purpose to things. It is a letter full of love and affection, and yet there is a kind of wisdom to it, and it’s this wisdom that astonishes me.”
--**Rabbi Jack Bemporad**

“Valli Ollendorff’s letter is one of the most dramatic testimonies from Theresienstadt. I was genuinely touched when I read it.”
--**Vaclav Havel**
President of the Czech Republic

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FATE DID NOT LET ME GO *A Mother’s Farewell Letter*

Written by **Valli Ollendorff**
Foreword by **Stephen A. Ollendorff**
Photography by **Ivo Pervan and Alex Bemporad**

“Her voice, like Anne Frank’s voice, will be heard for generations.”
--Martin Sheen

On August 24, 1942, just a few days before she entered Theresienstadt concentration camp, Valli Ollendorff wrote this letter to her middle son. Secure in the knowledge that Ulrich was safe in America, and fearful of what the future held for her, Valli poured out her fear and longing, as well as her love and hope, in this brief document. Valli died less than two months later, and her remarkable letter was lost for forty-three years. Now, thanks to the courage and generosity of Valli’s descendants, families worldwide can share its universal message.

ABOUT THE BOOK

All royalties from the sale of this book will benefit the Ollendorff Center for Religious and Human Understanding, which promotes tolerance and understanding between people of all faiths. Visit www.fatedidnotletmego.org for more information.

ABOUT THE DOCUMENTARY

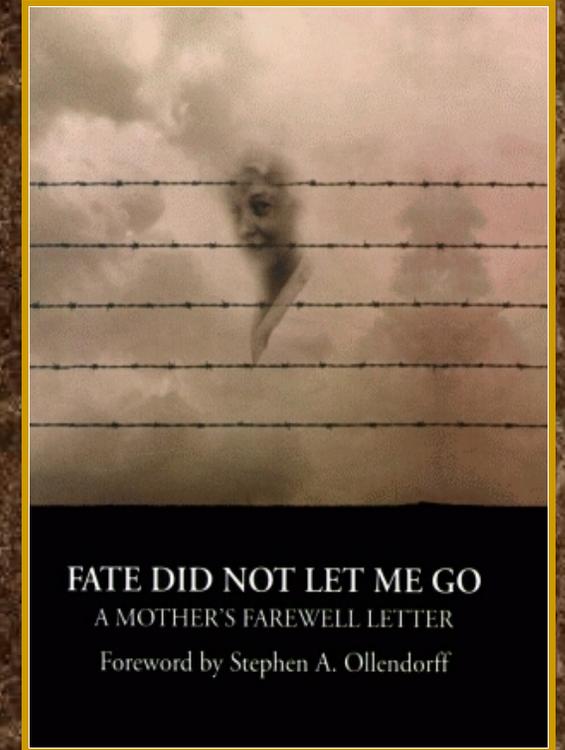
Jacov and Dominic Sedlar directed the PBS documentary *Fate Did Not Let Me Go*, featuring narration by Martin Sheen and Liv Ullman. The film is available on VHS and DVD from Terra Entertainment. Call (800) 723-9479, or go to www.shopterra.com.

FATE DID NOT LET ME GO

A Mother’s Farewell Letter
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Foreword by **Stephen A. Ollendorff**
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