



All Alone (1944)
Paper, watercolor, graphite pencil
13.3 cm x 19 cm
Collection of Sharon Segall

Born: 1935 in Lwów Poland

Education: Rutgers University,
Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia;
Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania

5 Facts:

1. Lwów, Poland exists today as Lviv, Ukraine. This territory was given to the Ukraine government after the Nazi empire was dissolved.
2. Nelly Toll's artworks and diary are some of only a few artifacts in existence that were created by Jewish children during the Holocaust.
3. During the Holocaust, victims were targeted because of their Jewish faith and ethnicity, but other groups such as Roma (gypsies), and Slavic peoples (Russians and Poles) were also targeted. People of opposing political or social backgrounds were persecuted as well.
4. Nelly Toll's story is unique because not many families would have risked hiding a Jewish family during this time.
5. Thousands of Jewish children were hidden, like Nelly Toll, to protect them from the Holocaust. Often their names were changed and they were hidden from sight so they would not be discovered.

“I draw my pictures, and make up little stories, which I enjoy a lot. Because when I paint I forget to be afraid...”
—**Behind the Secret Window, 1993**

Nelly Toll was born in Lwów, Poland in 1935. She recalls being six years old when the Germans entered Lwów. First greeted as heroes, the Germans quickly turned their attention to the persecution and deportation of the Jews. During this period Toll created a diary which documented the trauma of hiding from the Nazis. She also created some sixty watercolor paintings which illustrated a fantasy world in which there was happiness and hope.

*As a young child, Toll lived with her mother in a room in the home of a Catholic family, and hid in a “secret window,” standing mutely on the sill of a window bricked-up from the outside when required to hide. As described by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the life of Nelly and children like her “was a life in shadows, where a careless remark, a denunciation, or the murmurings of inquisitive neighbors could lead to discovery and death.” Given a watercolor set by her mother, she painted small pictures of what she imagined a normal life would resemble. The images are filled with friends playing outside, pretty new dresses, parties, dinners, pets, and family—things that young Nelly could not have in hiding. In stark contrast to the imaginary world of her paintings, Toll also kept a diary that chronicled a young child’s experience of life in Nazi-occupied Poland. Toll and her mother were liberated by the Russian army in July, 1944, and later emigrated to the United States. Toll reported she and her remaining family celebrated the end of the war in Kraków, Poland in May, 1945. As an adult Toll wrote an award-winning book about her experience, *Behind the Secret Window (1993)*, based on her childhood diary.*

Toll believes strongly in emphasizing the positive values she took away from her experience to triumph over adversity. Dr. Toll still visits middle schools, high schools, higher education institutions and community centers across the country to share her story, making contemporary connections between the Holocaust and the dangers of bullying. Her watercolors are exhibited at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and reside also in the collections of the Illinois Holocaust Education Center and Museum and Yad Vashem Museum in Israel.