



Journey to Vaja: Reconstructing the World of a Hungarian-Jewish Family (McGill-Queen's Studies in Ethnic History)

Elaine Kalman Naves

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Northeastern Hungary was full of places like the village of Vaja, where Jews had farmed for generations. Naves's ancestors had tilled Hungarian soil since the eighteenth century. They had married into similar farming families and maintained a lifestyle at once agricultural, orthodox, and Hungariophile. The Nyírség, a sandy, slightly undulating region wedged between the Great Hungarian Plain and the foothills of the Carpathians, was the centre of their world. But all this changed irrevocably with the holocaust; Naves's generation is the first in two centuries whose roots are severed from the soil that once nurtured them. Naves's quest for her past began with her father, one of the few members of a vast extended family to survive the Nazi death camps. His stories and memories of ancestors were a well-spring from which he drew strength, and they became an obsession for Naves as she was growing up and when she had children of her own. Journey to Vaja is her attempt to record the lives of these ancestors and reclaim their lives as part of her and her children's birthright. It incorporates myths and stories with family letters and detailed archival research to provide an extraordinary look at the landscape of memory and a testament to the redemptive power of love and family.

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