

## *Don't Say Anything to Anybody* – 1-Page Synopsis

It was supposed to be a pretty little vacation in the countryside. Brigitte Yearman would stay with a farm family for a few weeks until her town was no longer a major bombing target. It was 1941. She was six. Like thousands of other German kids, she was sent to live with a foster parent in a rural village. In her case, that was near Germany's eastern border. She was safe there – at first.

Brigitte hadn't met anyone who questioned the government until she lived with her foster Aunt Anna, who readily criticized the Nazis. But when Anna's own brother was sent to a work camp, the whole town turned silent, living in fear.

By early 1945, the Russian front was closing in, and they'd known for months that Germany was losing. Brigitte was nine when she learned her own father, a drafted soldier, was wounded. There was no time to try to find him. Anna's family and Brigitte became refugees when Russian forces and Polish settlers arrived. As a refugee, Brigitte smuggled jewelry, outran soldiers, and became her foster family's scavenging breadwinner. She saw a friend's boat exploded by an underwater mine. She held her foster Oma in her arms as she passed away.

By foot and by train, the tattered family group eventually made it to West Germany, and Anna contacted the Red Cross to find Brigitte's biological family. Then they received the devastating news that Brigitte's mother had become ill after the war and passed away. She left behind Brigitte's father and two other children born during the war. Brigitte became obsessed with a desire to return to them to restore her "real family".

That wish came true, but surviving the post-war years with her impoverished father and, later, a physically abusive stepmother was as difficult as surviving the war itself. She found creative ways to get through and to escape. Yet her parents often forbade her from having close friends, from seeing how other people lived. Her stepmother forced her into the child labor programs that flourished after the war. But at seventeen, Brigitte managed to run away and started working in hotels in the new reconstruction economy. Still, she occasionally returned home for a little financial stability.

Working at a resort in North Germany, she met a Jewish girl for the first time. Like other child refugees, Brigitte had been focused on her own survival for years. She didn't know a thing about the Holocaust. Her new friend educated her. Brigitte was stunned, and rightly disillusioned, seeing her own experiences in a new light. She realized how unhealthy her own home life was, how nothing was going to get better. Instead of returning home during the off-season, she moved even farther away, to finally break free and build a life on her own.