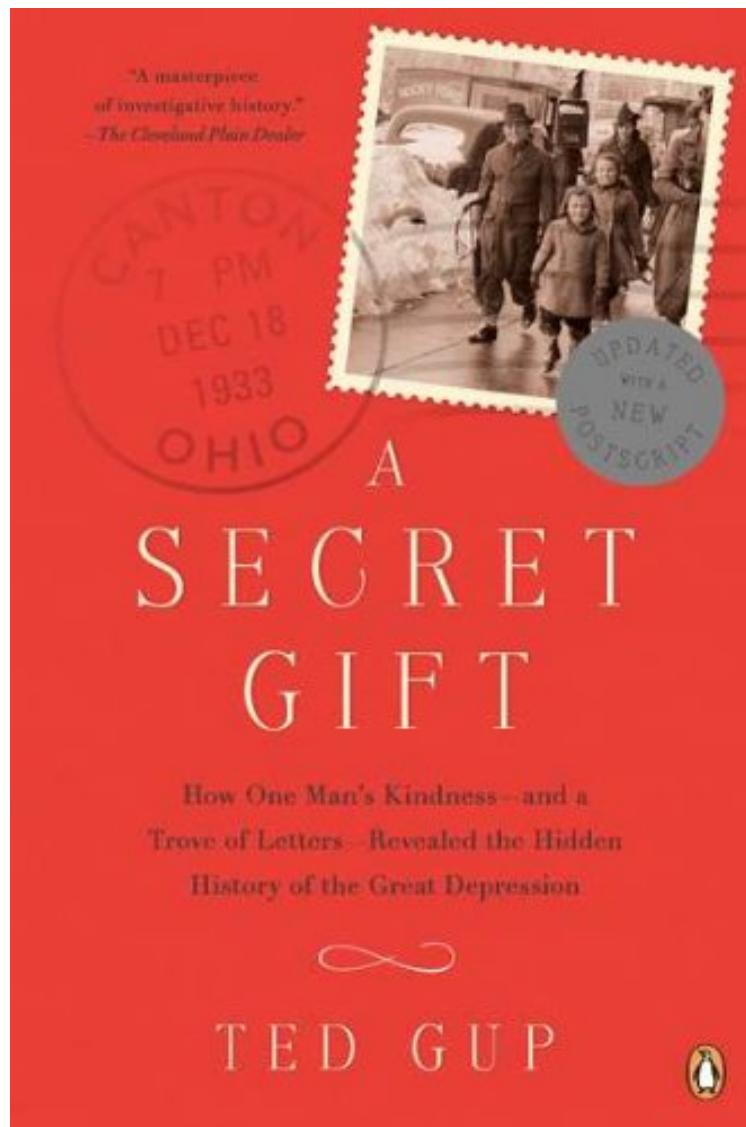


(Download pdf ebook) A Secret Gift: How One Man's Kindness--and a Trove of Letters--Revealed the Hidden History of t he Great Depression

## A Secret Gift: How One Man's Kindness--and a Trove of Letters-- Revealed the Hidden History of t he Great Depression

Ted Gup

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**Ted Gup : A Secret Gift: How One Man's Kindness--and a Trove of Letters--Revealed the Hidden History of t he Great Depression** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Secret Gift: How One Man's Kindness--and a Trove of Letters--Revealed the Hidden History of t he Great Depression:

144 of 145 people found the following review helpful. How a kindness lifted the dreary lives of a few of The Great Depression victims

By Susanna Hutcheson I've long had a keen interest in The Great Depression. I saw the effects of it in the lives of my grandparents and parents and was always curious about why they did some of the things they did. Why did they hoard things? Save things that to me seemed useless? Why did my grandparents keep their money in cash at home? Why wouldn't they talk about the Depression when I asked about it? When I read this well-written, eloquent book, it brought tears to my eyes. And, I'm not a woman given to tears. Author Ted Gup takes us back to a time that is, in many ways, being repeated even now. So, it's timely. And yet, it's history. A moving, terrible history. It's hard to read about it. It must have been total hell to live it. Gup interviewed about five hundred descendants --- "many of them multiple times." There are many books written about the Depression economy. We've tried to learn what happened to cause the Depression and who or what caused it to finally lift. Though we still don't really have all those answers, we do have the opportunity to study it. But the people who suffered through it are not in those books for the most part. In this book, however, they're the stars. We feel their suffering and understand why a generation was like it was and how it produced yet another generation that was similar. But it's more than even that. It's a mystery. The author discovers his own grandfather was the mystery-giver of \$750 in anonymous money given in \$5 checks in 1933. Why did his grandfather, Sam Stone, do it? And why did he choose to be anonymous and indeed was for 75 years? The author didn't find all the answers but he found many that surprised even him. He found out things about his grandfather he never knew. "For one moment, in one forgotten town, one man managed to shrink the vastness of the Depression to a human scale," he says. The money was given to white collar people. As one letter writer said in his gracious thank you letter to the giver, "Most people don't think about us." In other words, we worry about those who are always poor but we think little of those who worked hard to build something and then in the wink of an eye lost it all. Those who went from prosperity to poverty thanks to the Depression that engulfed the world in the thirties. The Depression hit white collar people hard. Perhaps because they had gotten so high and the fall was further and harder. Some recovered. Others never did. About those tragic days, the son of a woman who lived through the Depression said, "There was a loss of confidence. For her, the good times were wonderful, then all hell broke out. Friends of hers said she had been full of pep and vigor. I didn't know her that way at all, so I think it probably did a job on her. It crushed her a little." My guess is it crushed her a lot. It probably took her spirit. Stone invited people to write to him and tell him about their experiences. He wanted to know how the people felt. He offered them the opportunity to express their sorrow and sadness. And they needed that more than even the money in many ways. They didn't talk to anyone about their hardship. Not even their spouses. So to be able to write it all out was a gift to them. There was a sense of shame, embarrassment. And the white collar people felt that perhaps more than others because their fall was so public. They were pillars of the community. They didn't want the dole. They wanted work. They would do any job. "In the wasteland of the Depression, when men rarely felt free to truly open up to one another and share their doubts, Sam Stone had created a rare comfort zone. Those who had long guarded their feelings could finally release them without fear of disappointing others or humiliating themselves," the author says. Of course, the money was a true blessing because in those days \$5 was equal to \$100 today. The author writes with great compassion and understanding. He brings The Great Depression to life. My own grandparents were middle age people with children during the Depression. My parents were adolescents and then teens during that decade. I was born into prosperity. And those younger than me have known nothing but prosperity. It would be well for us all to visit our roots. I felt ashamed and saddened at comments I made to my mother for saving things she never used. To me that was senseless. Now I see why she did it and I'm sorry for my thoughtless comments to her. I wish I could tell her. Sometimes it takes a book like this one to give us the gift of seeing life through the eyes of others. In that sense, the author's grandfather's gift is still giving through this wonderful book and these precious stories. And as countless homes are being repossessed and people are hurting, people losing jobs and security, it may be the best time for this special gift. The author tells us, "As Sam Stone himself learned more than once, the bright line that separated the favored class from those below them could dissolve almost overnight, exposing the fragile divide between the haves and have-nots." Why did Sam Stone give this gift? What was his secret past? You'll have to read the book to find out. It's a book you will love and from which you'll gain an entirely new appreciation for one, perhaps two misunderstood generations. Highly recommended.-- Susanna K. Hutcheson

64 of 64 people found the following review helpful. Real people

By S. R. Schnur Sam Stone's grandson discovered Sam had been an anonymous donor of five dollar checks to some of the most needy people in Canton, Ohio in 1933. This is a true detective story. This is the exactly right time to tell the story. Imagine for a moment working hard, paying bills promptly, and putting money regularly into the savings bank. Then suddenly you lost your job. There was no unemployment insurance. You go to the bank and find it closed with all your savings gone. There is no FDIC. You try to sell your belongings. Sometimes this will feed the family for a while. Once your furniture is gone, and your house repossessed, and you are living as a whole family without heat or a bed in a room somewhere. Five dollars sometimes gave people enough hope to save them from suicide. Sometimes it meant an orange and a pair of shoes. Ted Gup found descendants of the people his grand father had helped. He even found one still living who could remember the help. He followed up every one of his grandfather's checks, a tremendous task in itself. But equally important he learned that his generous life affirming grandfather was an illegal alien who loved his adopted country

with fear and passion. This is an elegant book that brings to life early 20th century history. Read it please, and be glad for our safety nets no matter how inadequate they may be. It was once so much worse. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Time to tell the secrets... and Wow! By Mary Ann This book does for the depression what Bob Greene's book about the North Platte Canteen did for World War II. It puts the best faces of America right where we can see them. About 25 years ago, my husband asked his grandmother about the Depression. She got this faraway look in her eye, and all she could say was, "There was no money. . ." and then she told us more detail. I then went to my father, who was just a bit younger than she, and put the question to him. He got this faraway look in his eye, and all he could say was, "There was no money. . ." and then he started in. To grasp the terrible need of the time, you just had to be there, and Ted Gup has done a masterful job of allowing his grandparents and their contemporaries to share about the Christmas season of 1933, when "There was no money. . ." I have read practically nonstop for three days.

"A wonderful reminder that economic hardship can bring suffering but can also foster compassion and community." - The Boston Globe In hard economic times like these, readers will find bestselling author Ted Gup's unique book uplifting as well as captivating. Inside a suitcase kept in his mother's attic, Gup discovered letters written to his grandfather in response to an ad placed in a Canton, Ohio, newspaper in 1933 that offered cash to seventy-five families facing a devastating Christmas. The author travels coast to coast to unveil the lives behind the letters, describing a range of hardships and recreating in his research the hopes and suffering of Depression-era Americans, even as he uncovers the secret life led by the grandfather he thought he knew.

From Publishers Weekly In a book grown out of a New York Times op-ed piece that drew a huge response, Gup (*The Book of Honor*) explores an unusual act of generosity by his grandfather, Sam Stone, during the Great Depression and other mysteries of Stone's life. Discovering a trunk full of old letters addressed to "Mr. B. Virdot," Gup soon learned that the letters were responses to a newspaper ad Stone ran before Christmas 1933, anonymously promising to 75 of Canton, Ohio's neediest families if they wrote letters describing their hardships. (Some of the heartbreaking letters are reprinted here.) But Gup soon learns that Stone had other secrets: the jovial, wealthy businessman had escaped a horrific childhood as a Romanian Jew, immigrating to America and reinventing himself to fit into all-American Canton, Ohio. Gup also tracked down families who benefited from Stone's gift to discover the impact it had on their lives. Gup paints sobering pictures of "the Hard Times" and the gift made by a successful man who hadn't forgotten his own hard times. (Nov.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. From Booklist Investigative reporter Gup researched a file of Depression-era letters preserved by his family. They were responses to a Canton, Ohio, newspaper notice that Gup's grandfather, using a pseudonym, had placed in December 1933, which offered a monetary gift and, perhaps more importantly, a promise of anonymity to recipients of his charity. That tapped into social attitudes characteristic of the Depression generation: pride in self-reliance matched by mortification to be seen accepting help, overlain with disdain for complaining. Those characteristics vividly animate Gup's remarkable portraits of the letter writers, which encompass their backgrounds, their bewildering descent to destitute circumstances, and the influence of the Depression on their own and their children's subsequent working lives. A subplot involving the identity of Gup's advertising grandfather, who, for unknown reasons, obfuscated his birth in Romania, also productively interacts with the main plot of what motivated his manner of giving money away at Christmastime. Highly affecting emotionally, Gup's empathic portraits should powerfully pique memories in Gup's readers about their own family's experience of the economic trauma of the 1930s. --Gilbert Taylor About the Author Ted Gup is the author of the bestseller *The Book of Honor* and of *Nation of Secrets*. He is a professor and chair of the journalism department at Emerson College. A former investigative reporter for *The Washington Post* and *Time*, he has also written for *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *GQ*, *Slate*, and *Salon.com*.