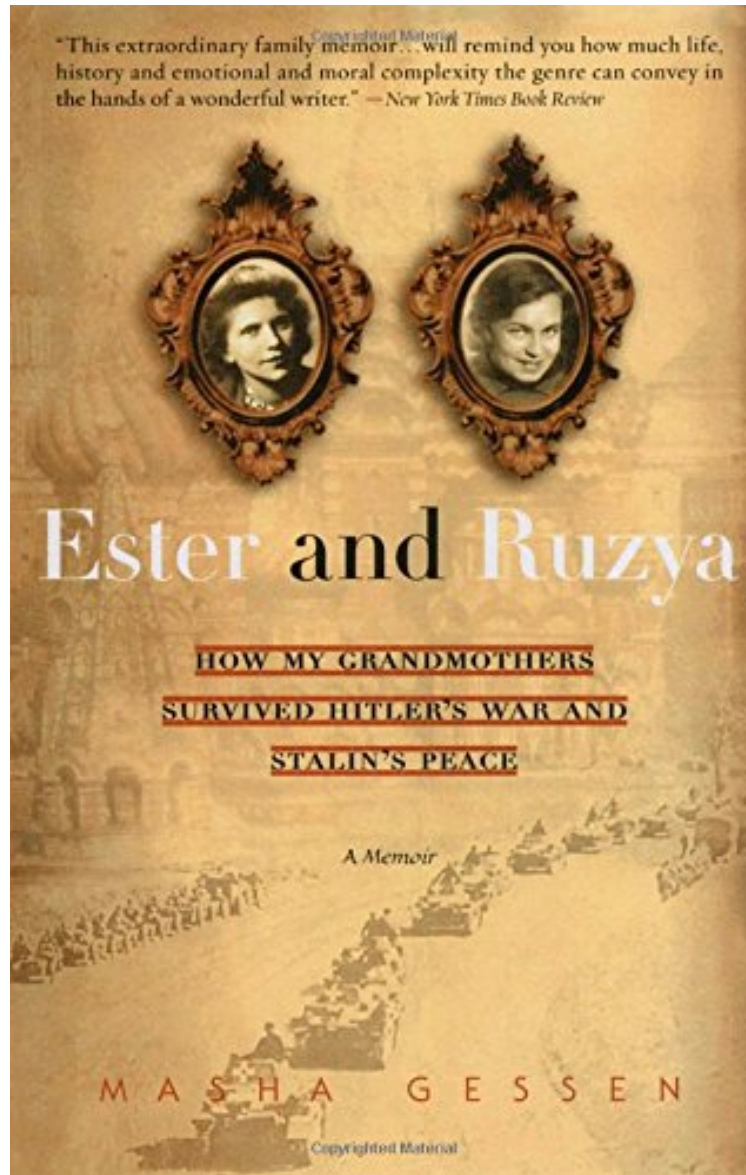


Ester and Ruzya: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler's War and Stalin's Peace

Masha Gessen

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#233071 in Books Gessen, Masha 2005-10-25 2005-10-25 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.30 x .80 x 5.201, .88 #File Name: 0385336055384 pages | File size: 51.Mb

Masha Gessen : Ester and Ruzya: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler's War and Stalin's Peace before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ester and Ruzya: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler's War and Stalin's Peace:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. goodBy Mom of 6 good kidsThe way the book bounces back and

forth is a little confusing. I forget who is who when I'm reading. There are so many people and names to keep track of. Interesting read though. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent History and Biography By Dot This is a moving historical biography of Masha Gessen's grandmothers, one initially in Poland and the other in Moscow. Like them, the reader lives through so much unsettling historical background. The only difficulty is that it moves back and forth trying to following both sets of lives so that it becomes a dual biography and history and sometimes difficult to "combine" and retain all the information. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. WONDERFUL book about two strong women and a history we ... By Grrrl WONDERFUL book about two strong women and a history we can't easily imagine. Great book to give as a gift which I've also done!

In this moving family memoir, Masha Gessen—journalist and author of *The Future Is History*—reveals the story of her two grandmothers, who defied Fascism and Communism during a time when tyranny reigned. In the 1930s, as waves of war and persecution were crashing over Europe, two young Jewish women began separate journeys of survival. One, a Polish-born woman from Bialystok, where virtually the entire Jewish community would soon be sent to the ghetto and from there to Hitler's concentration camps, was determined not only to live but to live with pride and defiance. The other, a Russian-born intellectual and introvert, would eventually become a high-level censor under Stalin's regime. At war's end, both women found themselves in Moscow, where informers lurked on every corner and anti-Semitism reigned. It was there that Ester and Ruzya would first cross paths, there that they became the closest of friends and learned to trust each other with their lives. In this deeply moving family memoir, journalist Masha Gessen tells the story of her two beloved grandmothers: Ester, the quicksilver rebel who continually battled the forces of tyranny; Ruzya, a single mother who joined the Communist Party under duress and made the compromises the regime exacted of all its citizens. Both lost their first loves in the war. Both suffered unhappy unions. Both were gifted linguists who made their living as translators. And both had children—Ester a boy, and Ruzya a girl—who would grow up, fall in love, and have two children of their own: Masha and her younger brother. With grace, candor, and meticulous research, Gessen peels back the layers of secrecy surrounding her grandmothers' lives. As she follows them through this remarkable period in history—from the Stalin purges to the Holocaust, from the rise of Zionism to the fall of communism—she describes how each of her grandmothers, and before them her great-grandfather, tried to navigate a dangerous line between conscience and compromise. *Ester and Ruzya* is a spellbinding work of storytelling, filled with political intrigue and passionate emotion, acts of courage and acts of betrayal. At once an intimate family chronicle and a fascinating historical tale, it interweaves the stories of two women with a brilliant vision of Russian history. The result is a memoir that reads like a novel—and an extraordinary testament to the bonds of family and the power of hope, love, and endurance.

From *Publishers Weekly* After leaving Russia in 1981 when she was 14, journalist Gessen visited 10 years later and moved back a few years after that. The transition represents the two major themes of her memoir: displacement and familial ties. After reconnecting with her Russian kin, Gessen seeks to explore her roots. Rather than tell her own story, Gessen reaches into her family's past, weaving together the stories of her two grandmothers as they live through the turmoil and terror of the first half of the 20th century. The two Jewish women, born in separate countries, meet and become friends in 1949, after fleeing persecution and war in Poland and Russia. The terrors strengthen their friendship, Gessen writes: "It was probably most like family: a bond that once established, was believed permanent." Both have children, who then fall in love with each other and have children of their own, including Gessen. By using the present tense, Gessen gives the memoir a sense of immediacy. She also deftly puts her grandmothers' experiences in context by describing the brutal realities of Stalin's regime and the desperation of Jews trying to escape Nazi concentration camps. This blend of historical depth with personal experience is a powerful mix, illuminating how family and friendship can grow in even the darkest eras. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Booklist* One of Gessen's grandmothers was from Bialystok, Poland, and eventually worked as a translator for the NKVD; the other one was an intellectual who became a censor under Stalin's regime and, later, a translator. At the end of World War II, they met in Moscow. Ester's son and Ruzya's daughter married and had two children, one of them being the author. Her memoir begins with an account of Polish Jewish life in the mid- to late 1930s, when pogroms were coming in waves. And this is also the story of Jakub, Ester's father, who lived in a ghetto in Nazi-occupied Bialystok, where he was a member of the Judenrat presidium, in charge of rationing. Gessen grew up in Moscow, later came to the U.S., and returned to visit the Soviet Union in 1991; later, she finally decided to stay. For most of the last 10 years she has been a foreign journalist in Moscow. This astonishing and deeply moving story is related with a masterful eye for the human detail that makes history come alive. George Cohen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved A loving memoir of two grandmothers that offers a penetrating look at two killer regimes. Masha Gessen's wonderful book portrays human beings trying to live justly when there is virtually no way to do so." --William Taubman, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* "This blend of historical depth with personal experience is a powerful mix, illuminating how family and friendship can grow in even the darkest eras." --*Publishers Weekly* "A journalist's memoir of her

grandmothers also paints an eloquent portrait of two totalitarian powers, the havoc they wrought, and the countless burdens they imposed on ordinary families.... A masterful chronicle of dark and dangerous years, and a distinguished addition to the history of totalitarianism." --Kirkus s" ers sometimes call a work of nonfiction 'as exciting as a novel,' but that would be an understatement applied to this extraordinary family memoir.... Ester and Ruzya will remind you how much life, history and emotional and moral complexity the genre can convey in the hands of a wonderful writer." --New York Times Book From the Hardcover edition.