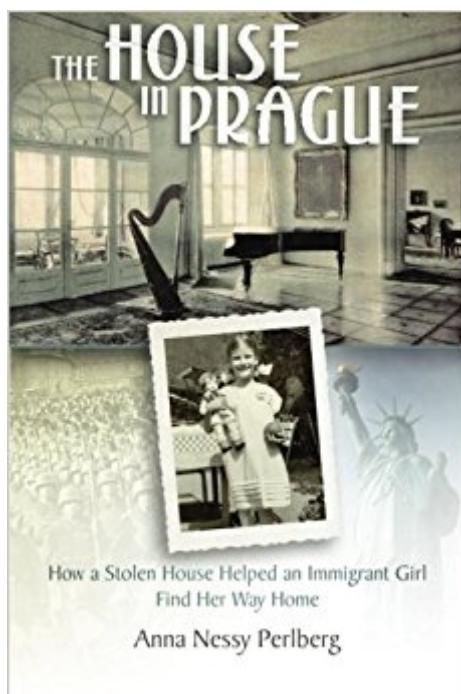


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The House In Prague: How A Stolen House Helped An Immigrant Girl Find Her Way Home



Synopsis

A cherished house, the family it sheltered, and the true meaning of home 1939: the Nazis have invaded Prague. Little Anna huddles with her doll in the corner of a train car while a German officer shrieks, "You are Jews!" Fleeing for their lives, her family has abandoned their elegant house near Prague Castle, bringing their life of privilege to an abrupt halt. In this memoir that reads like a novel, we meet Anna's shining and beautiful opera singer mother, her prominent lawyer father, and their circle of friends that includes Albert Schweitzer and the family of Czech President Thomas Masaryk. Through Anna's eyes, we relive magical Christmases, summers in the country, and a terrifying trip to Nazi Dresden that changes everything. We witness the family's escape and voyage to Ellis Island, and Anna's struggle to become an American girl in a city teeming with immigrants and prejudice. Post-war life brings cherished Holocaust survivors and their harrowing stories. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Anna's family sues for the return of their house in Prague. But will they prevail? And if they do, what then? The House in Prague is richly illustrated with pictures from the author's family archive. Written with straightforward, lyrical clarity, her family members and the many famous musicians, authors, and poets that pass through their lives come alive for the reader. A gripping story on its own merits, this tale of war, love, and loss dares us to think about the immigrant experience in fresh ways. Index included. "An exquisite rumination on history, loss, and love. Anna Perlberg's voice is a luminous guide to the heart of home - hers, but also, as is true of all great stories, ours." (Caroline Heller, author of *Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts*)

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Customer Reviews

"An exquisite rumination on history, loss, and love. Anna Perlberg's voice is a luminous guide to the heart of home--hers, but also, as is true of all great stories, ours." (Caroline Heller, author of *Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts*) "A beautiful, vividly-observed memoir, this is the story of the indomitable Backer family. We meet Anna's mother, a world-famous opera singer; her father, a prominent Prague lawyer; family friends that include the children of Thomas G. Masaryk, first president of the Czech Republic, and Albert Schweitzer. Anna's family flees to America in 1939 and is later joined by three cherished Holocaust survivors. Their historic house in Prague is a major character in itself. A lovely book." (Marie Winn, author, *Red-Tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park*) "An exquisite rumination on history, loss, and love. Anna Perlberg's voice is a luminous guide to the heart of home--hers, but also, as is true of all great stories, ours." --Caroline Heller, author of *Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts*; professor, Leslie University "A beautiful, vividly-observed memoir, this is the story of the indomitable Backer family . . . Their historic house in Prague is a major character in itself. A lovely book." --Marie Winn, author, *Red-Tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park*, former *Wall Street Journal* columnist

Anna Nessy Perlberg was born in Prague in the late 1920s. She and her family escaped to New York just a few days after the Nazi invasion in 1939. From her early years of privilege in Prague, to the struggles of a young immigrant in New York City, from her years at Barnard and Columbia University to a career of service and a loving and story-filled marriage with her poet-husband Mark Perlberg, Anna has lived by the humanitarian principles that were instilled in her by her parents. Ms. Perlberg holds a BA in History from Barnard, an MA in History from Columbia University, and an MSW from the University of Illinois. Anna feels a connection with today's immigrant children and often speaks about her story to school groups. She and her late husband, the poet Mark Perlberg, settled in Chicago, where she resides.

"The House in Prague," is the story of Anna Nessy Perlberg's beautiful home in Prague, how she fled in 1939, and the epic journey of her life in America as a young girl who barely spoke English. Only the first quarter of the book is about her life in Prague (she left at age 7). She came from a an extraordinary family, wealthy, educated, and talented. Her mother, Julia Nessy, was an opera singer. She had perfect pitch and could sing for Schoenberg and Berg; she knew Josef Suk (Dvorak's son-in-law) and George Szell, whom she and Anna visited when he gave a Czech music concert in New York. Julia played duets in her home with Alfred Schweitzer (who was also a Bach

scholar and musician). They were friends with Thomas Masaryk, the first Czech president (after WWI) and his family, some of whom Anna came to know as part of the Czech community in New York. And what a home it was. Her father was a wealthy lawyer, also musical, and the large house had two concert grand pianos and two harps. They had a staff of a cook, a governess, maids, a driver. The book is really centered on that house and her memories of the people in it, and their fates in America. Her father was Jewish, and the tale of their flight across Germany and into Holland with little Anna clutching her doll is vivid and terrifying. Half his family died in the camps; he left just days before they came for him. But there is more here about the extraordinary immigrant experience in America. As a little girl in New York, Anna learned English largely from memorizing popular songs and radio dramas. And there is a lot here about her education, her going to Columbia University, meeting writer and poet Mark Perlberg, and going with her new husband to Tokyo, as he was an army reporter during the Korean war. Their lives in Chicago, where Mark reported for Time Magazine, were full of activities in the arts and in politics. But always the house is in the background and all the people, like ghosts, who haunt her memories, and who come in and out of her life as they pass through New York and Chicago. In the end, when the Communists fall, she and her brother sue the Czech government to get her house back. Finally, this is a story about how great tides of history can overwhelm even the happiest and most secure individual lives and families. The book is beautifully produced and illustrated.

A beautiful story masterfully written. A reader will be drawn in from the first page as all the characters and the home itself quickly become vividly familiar. This reading experience is more like watching a movie than reading pages of written word because the story is so encompassing that the reader is swept into and becomes part of the family and its story.

I was very moved by "The House in Prague" and recommend it highly. Anna Perlberg's attention to detail helped me visualize her life in Prague, complete with her hair in braids and ribbons. No word is wasted in this memoir. I pictured her journey from Europe to New York clearly, almost as if I were there. In spite of many losses, Anna Perlberg writes without a shred of self pity. Her story is one of great resilience and hope. It is a joy to read.

Thanks to Anna for sharing her amazing life story. I only wish I could have had her right next to me as I read to talk to her about all of these experiences and amazing people. The musicians, artists and heroes gave me new insights into Prague and the Holocaust. It is a special book that takes a

sad and historic story and gives you personal insights that make it real for the reader. Anna and her families' powerful and positive spirit permeates these pages and their important family history.

This is a very easy read. I have Czech heritage on my mothers side. I love visiting Prague it's such a beautiful city. My father's side of the family is from Munich and left as political dissidents just as WWII began. So Anna's story seemed to blend my families history into one. It was also rang very true/believable from stories I heard from my own family.

Having visited Prague and Terezin, and walked the streets for hours, I could share ' virtually' in this illustrious family's soul and heart-wrenching emigration from their home, to America. Anna Perlberg's writing has touched me deeply. I loved this book. It is a worthwhile read.

I have read many of World War II stories, this one is one of the best personal stories of people that live through this I find incredibly fascinating I never get enough of it

I chose this rating because the book was easy to read and kept my interest throughout. The author's family could have easily ended up in a concentration camp if it were not for the holy pictures in her mother's purse! Thank God they were able to leave Europe.

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