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Castles Burning: A Childs Life In War



Synopsis

There are few figures in literature as riveting as the precocious nine-year-old Magda Denes who narrates this story. Her stubborn self-command and irrepressible awareness of the absurd make her in her mother's eyes "impossibly sarcastic, bigmouthed, insolent, and far too smart" for her own good. When her family goes into hiding from the fascist Arrow-Cross, she is torn from the "castle" of intimacies shared with her adored and adoring older brother and plunged into a world of incomprehensible deprivation, separation, and loss. Her rage, and her ability to feel devastating sorrow and still to insist on life, will reach every reader at the core. Recounting an odyssey through the wreckage and homelessness of postwar Europe, *Castles Burning* embodies a powerful personality, a stunning gift for prose and storytelling, a remarkable sense of humor, and true emotional wisdom and makes a magnificent contribution to the literature of childhood and war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This steely account of a childhood on the run, first from the Nazis and then as a refugee in postwar Europe, serves as a fitting memorial to the author, who died in December 1996, shortly before the book was published. Magda Denes settled in America and became a psychoanalyst, which may explain her total lack of sentimentality about her youthful self. The fierce emotions of childhood--exacerbated in this case by the danger she faced as a Jew in fascist Hungary--have seldom been better portrayed. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This extraordinarily moving Holocaust memoir adds a new dimension to the literature. Denes was

five years old in 1939 when her father, a wealthy Hungarian Jewish publisher, left Hungary after his newspaper was seized by the authorities, leaving Magda, her 12-year-old brother, Ivan, and their mother to cope with wartime conditions in Budapest and, ultimately, the German takeover in March 1944. The author recounts with unsentimental candor how she and her family survived years of hiding in Hungary and, later, lived as displaced persons in Germany. Denes endured starvation, the death of her beloved brother and homelessness with a feisty refusal to give way to despair. What sustained her and what makes this recollection remarkable is Denes's ability to recall and express the enormous hostility she felt toward her mother for placing her in homes away from her family, her impatience with her aunt and grandparents, her fury at her father for his desertion and the cynicism beyond her years she used as a defense against an insane world. Photos not seen by PW. Author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Castles Burning is a wonderful book. The author was a child growing up amidst the Holocaust and her family's terrible struggle for survival. Some of them did not survive. The author, who later became a psychoanalyst and professor in NYC, was quite a brilliant precocious child- who managed to convey from a psychological point of view, the experience of growing up in her unique family with their particular set of circumstances. The author died, just at the time of the publication of this book. If you can get a copy- I highly recommend it.

This book is a keeper. It tells the story through the eyes of a Jewish child in a world gone mad because of World War II. In 1939, Megda Denes and her older brother Ivan and their mother are abandoned by her father as Hungary is attacked by the Nazis. Her father goes to America and they never hear from him again. They are forced to move in with the mother's parents in a small, cramped apartment. They often have little food, clothes or blankets to keep them warm. Megda chronicles the years she and her family spent hiding from the Nazis. Even though she is a child, she is old far beyond her years. She has a sharp mind and tongue, also a sharp wit. And often she takes on the role of mother for her own mother who sometimes finds it too difficult to cope with what is happening. How this nine year old child managed to survive is a wonder when one thinks of what she had to endure. But the story is told in her brave and unforgettable voice. There are times when the story brought tears to my eyes, and other times when I had to chuckle when I read how she processed what was going on around her.

This is one of 8 books required for a college course I am currently taking on the Holocaust. After having read Livia Bitton-Jackson and Primo Levi's accounts of their year in Auschwitz, I read Magda's account of her family's hiding during the war and subsequent journey in search of peace and freedom in the ensuing years. I found the first 2 books to be sad and horrifying. They were well written and definitely eye-opening and heart-wrenching. Magda's book is all that plus some. At times she made me laugh so hard I almost cried. I love her sarcasm, her ornery-ness, and her passion for asking questions and defying authority. I think that there is something in her that I connect with - a similar streak of insolence. I love the book and was very sad to find that Magda had passed. I would've loved to have met and spoken with her. I am sure she is currently exchanging verbal barbs with Ivan, who has waited so very long for her to join him.

This book shall remain in my library permanently. Do not mistake this as simply an "Anne Frank" copycat; it is not! Nor is this just another Nazi story. What makes this book so incredible is her comments about life and loneliness. Interestingly, there is also laugh-aloud humor sprinkled throughout. The end of the book, unlike Wiesel et al., leaves one feeling upbeat. It is a remarkable, true account, written by a successful NYC psychiatrist on her deathbed due to breast cancer and published posthumously. **THIS BOOK SHOULD NOT BE MISSED!**

My heart was engaged by the spunky, truth-telling of a 10 y/o about her profound, tragic experience of living through terror of Nazi control of Hungary. Not your usual Holocaust book. You will not be disappointed.

On our recent trip to Hungary, we visited the Jewish Quarter and the Holocaust museum in Budapest. This poignant biography of a young Jewish girl during the Nazi occupation of WWII definitely made an emotional connection for us as she and her family fought for survival during this incredibly difficult part of Hungarian history. Memories and events of our childhood impact who we are as individuals.

It was such a good book. Have read many Holocaust books, & this is the first one written with a touch of humor which I enjoyed.

When I picked up "Castles Burning", I thought at the back of my mind, "OK another book on the war, another book on suffering, let's see how good this is". It is sad, but true, that coz of the proliferation

of literature on the Second World War and the Holocaust, one gets "immune" to the immensity of depravity and suffering in that period of time, when paradoxically, it is meant to make one more aware and more empathetic to the experiences of that time. Magda's book was special. Not only is it written through the eyes of a little girl, it shows the suffering of ALL who have been involved in the war, and tells us that with immediate deprivation and starvation facing you, there just is no time or energy left to think of others' sufferings, though theirs is comparably more serious and threatening. It sounds bad, but that is the truth, that faced with personal suffering, it is often impossible to bother about what others are facing. Magda's growing maturity and her relationship with her brother is well-told. His growth into manhood and her feeling of being left behind is also something all of us would have felt at one point in our lives. Magda's voice is powerful, angry and poignant, esp. when she speaks of her father who abandoned the family before the war and fails to see the wrong in it. Her strength comes through in her desire to survive and her rejection of her father and we wonder if we would have come out as well if we had been placed in the same situation. One of the best memoirs of the war years. Readable and touching, Magda's is a voice which will remain with us for a long time.

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