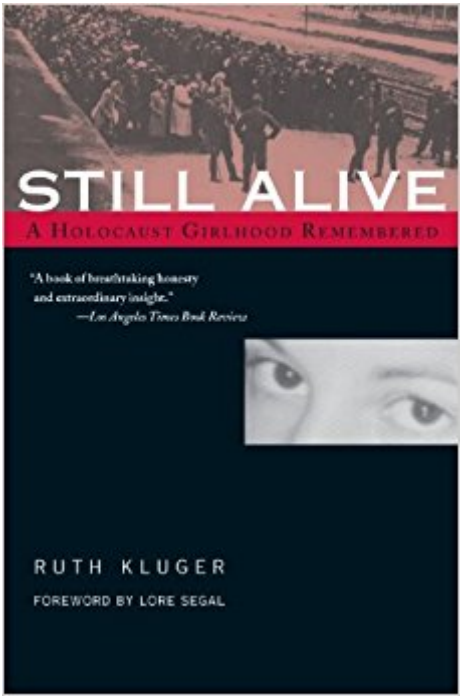
Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered (The Helen Rose Scheuer Jewish Women's Series)



Synopsis

Swept up as a child in the events of Nazi-era Europe, Ruth Kluger saw her family's comfortable Vienna existence systematically undermined and destroyed. By age eleven, she had been deported, along with her mother, to Theresienstadt, the first in a series of concentration camps which would become the setting for her precarious childhood. Kluger's story of her years in the camps and her struggle to establish a life after the war as a refugee survivor in New York, has emerged as one of the most powerful accounts of the Holocaust.Interwoven with blunt, unsparing observations of childhood and nuanced reflections of an adult who has spent a lifetime thinking about the Holocaust, Still Alive rejects all easy assumptions about history, both political and personal. Whether describing the abuse she met at her own mother's hand, the life-saving generosity of a woman SS aide in Auschwitz, the foibles and prejudices of Allied liberators, or the cold shoulder offered by her relatives when she and her mother arrived as refugees in New York, Kluger sees and names an unexpected reality which has little to do with conventional wisdom or morality tales.Still Alive is a memoir of the pursuit of selfhood against all odds, a fiercely bittersweet coming-of-age story in which the protagonist must learn never to rely on comforting assumptions, but always to seek her own truth.

Book Information

Series: The Helen Rose Scheuer Jewish Women's Series

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: The Feminist Press; First Thus edition (April 1, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1558614362

ISBN-13: 978-1558614369

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 48 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #25,107 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 inÃ Â Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Women Authors #16 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Women Writers #197 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Gender Studies

Customer Reviews

"Instead of God I believe in ghosts," writes the literary scholar Ruth Kluger in this harrowing memoir

of life under the yellow star, a controversial bestseller in Germany. Born in Vienna, Kluger somehow survived a girlhood spent in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Gross-Rosen. Some of the lessons she imparts are surprising, as when she argues, against other historians, that the female camp guards were far more humane than their male counterparts, and when she admits that she has difficulty today queuing in line, a constant of camp life, "out of revulsion for the bovine activity of simply standing." Her memories of her youth are punctuated by sharp reflections on the meaning of the Shoah and how it should best be memorialized in a time when ever fewer survivors are left to act as witnesses. Those reflections are often angry--"Absolutely nothing good came out of the concentration camps," she writes, recalling an argument with a naive German graduate student, "and he expects catharsis, purgation, the sort of thing you go to the theatre for?" But they are constantly provocative, too. Though readers will doubtless take issue with some of her conclusions, Kluger's insistent memoir merits a wide audience. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In the 1950s, when Kluger's children were small and growing up in the U.S., she caught German measles from them. Her family doctor said, "You must have led a sheltered childhood." In reality, she spent her early years in Theresienstadt and Birkenau-Auschwitz. Kluger's memoir which has already become a bestseller in Germany is a startling, clear-eyed and unflinching examination of growing up as a Jewish girl during the Holocaust. Calmly, and chillingly, relating the everyday events of her youth Aryan students making colored paper swastikas and then asking Jewish students to judge them, breaking the law to go to an Aryan movie house to see Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and being challenged by a neighbor Kluger charts how she and her family moved from a middle-class Viennese life to dealing with the constant threat of death in the camps. Kluger's style is wry ("the muse of history has a way of cracking bad jokes at the expense of the Jews"), and she can shock readers with simple, honest admissions, such as her embarrassment, in the 1970s, when her mother asks unanswerable questions of a speaker about the death camps. Kluger, who is now professor emerita at UC-Irvine and has won awards for this memoir as well as her literary criticism, has written a deeply moving and significant work that raises vital questions about cultural representations of the Holocaust (why did the highly praised, socially conscious 1947 film Gentleman's Agreement never mention "the Jewish catastrophe"?) and searches for what it means to be a survivor. Already compared by European critics to the work of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, this is an important addition to Jewish, Holocaust and women's studies. (Nov.) Forecast: This is a standout in the crowded field of Holocaust memoirs and should have

strong sales.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered (The Helen Rose Scheuer Jewish Women's Series) by Ruth KlugerÃ Â Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered (The Helen Rose Scheuer Jewish Women's Series)I loved the frankness of her prose. It seems this is the next generation of holocaust survivors: the children who grew up and led fulfilling lives. Almost every page has something memorable. I went through th 200 quotes I selected on my Kindle and caem up with the top ten or so:Recipes for gefilte fish are no recipe for coping with the HolocaustNo great poetry was composed in the concentration camps. If it were not so, one might entertain the idea that the camps were good for something, that they were, for example, a kind of catharsis, producing fine art. In fact, they weren't good for anythingThe French have only recently begun to remember how they collaborated with the Nazis; it was in France that my father was handed over to the Germans.I would have become an agnostic anyway, but the Nazis added to my disappointment the feeling of having grasped a rotten plank during a shipwreckEven though I despised the law that excluded me, I still felt ashamed to have been found out. For shame doesn't arise from the shameful action,but from discovery and exposure.should be obvious by now that these pages hardly deal with the Nazis. I didn't know any Nazis, but I knew the difficult, neurotic people whom they oppressed, families who hadn't had ideal lives anymore than their Christian neighbors had.Witness the foregoing pages, where I dusted off the ramshackle mementos of my father and brother, enjoying my stay in the attic of memory,my hearers act surprised, assume a stance of virtuous indignation, and tell me that, given the hardships we had to endure during the Hitler period, the victims should have come closer together and formed strong bonds. Particularly young people should have done so, say the elderly. But this is sentimental rubbish and depends on a false concept of suffering as a source of moral education.Only the language was what it had always been, the speech of my childhood with its peculiar inflections and rhythms, a sense of humor that Germans often don't get, and a wealth of malicious half tones that would be obscene in any other tongue; also an intense lyricism that easily degenerates into kitsch. I understand this language, but I don't like it. I speak it, but I wouldn't have chosen it. I am hooked on it, and it's the reason I go back for visits.In our hearts we all know that some aspects of the Shoah have been repeated elsewhere, today and yesterday, and will return in new guise tomorrow; and the camps, too, were only imitations (unique imitations, to be sure) of what had occurred the day before yesterdayWhat did he expect? Auschwitz was no instructional institution, like the University of GÃƒÂ¶ttingen, which he attends. You learned nothing there, and

least of all humanity and tolerance.How else are we to tell victims from victimizers? The camp sites hide as much as they communicate.Over the years many people have asked me: "I knew X or Y, who was interned at Theresienstadt. Surely you remember him or her?" Not once have I been able to give a positive answer. Theresienstadt wasn’t a village of friendly neighbors and social interaction. It was a transit station.To the Socialists and Communists in the camps, the Jewish prisoners were inferior beings: they had learned this much from the Nazis.in life, nothing offended me more than the generalization that the camps turned us all into brutal egotists, and whoever survived them must be morally defective. Again, the blithe refusal to look closely, to make distinctions, to reflect a little.and it was these unknown details that haunted me. I couldn’t talk to my mother about his death."There is some evidence that they tried to comfort one another, and wouldn’t that be better than resistance?" Again the silence.I see the other guy standing before the toilet, waiting for me to come out, no privacy anywhere. Life in a big stable. The owners occasionally show up in their ominous uniforms to make sure that the cattle behave. Makes you feel like the scum of the earth.Only when I had children of my own did I realize that one might well decide to kill them in Auschwitz rather than wait. I now believe that I would have had the same thought and perhaps carried it out more efficiently.Every survivor has his or her "lucky accident"--the turning point to which we owe our lives. Mine is peculiar because of the intervention of the stranger.They exchanged recipes the same way I recited poems. At night a favorite game was to surpass each other with the recital of generous amounts of butter, eggs, and sugar in fantasy baking contestsTherefore this is not the story of a Holocaust victim and becomes less and less so as it nears the endI write in their memory, and yet my account unavoidably turns into some kind of triumph of lifeBecause Konrad Lorenz became a Nazi and one of the Party’s privileged professors, yet after the war became a reasonable citizen again and was awarded a Nobel Prize. Lorenz himself denied that there was such a thing as evil; there was only "aggression," a normal expression of animal behavior, and fixed action patterns, he wrote. The title of his bestseller, On Aggression, is in the original So-Called Evil (Das sogenannte BÃƒÂ¶se). A morality derived from science in the service of denial.Martin Walser says, well, hatred of Jews was one of those variants of xenophobia which comes naturally to all men.I think that the Jewish catastrophe can’t be explained with abstract arguments taken from ethology or the mice of the veterinary science professor or Konrad Lorenz’s views on the strutting rivalry of male animals.And there were, in fact, both men and women with whorehouse fantasies who wanted to know whether I had been raped.I’d explain the concept of Rassenschande, the rule against miscegenation Aryan style, because I found it interesting that a malicious idea could serve as protection (albeit not a foolproof one) against sexual abuse.To make

a living and support my two sons, I went back to graduate school and became a professor of German literature. For many years I had refused to have anything to do with the language, the two countries (Austria and Germany), or their people. But I was good at my new jobThough the other side persists: belligerent Israelis will say, "Jews don't walk into gas chambers anymore," as they get ready to counter violence with violence. The Jews who were gassed are the inferior Jews in this scenario, which doesn't sit well with me.)What you have been reading is neither a translation nor a new book: it's another version, a parallel book, if you will, for my child ren and my American students.

I'm not sure if I would have ever picked this book up on my own to read. I had to read this for a class and the only one so far that I've acctually read out of 3 other books.The story was overall good and I'm glad I tool the time to read it. The only thing I didn't like is that it was jumpy. She talked about different things 8n different chapters from her past, from the present, something else she had already talked about before but added more detail.

This is a highly intelligently written book that relates the author's experiences. The author is insightful and analytical about herself and her reactions to the tragic events of her wartime life. It is an interesting book to be read and digested carefully. Well worth four stars.

I have to read this book for a German/Austrian Jewish Culture and History class, and it was definitely a shock to me. Fortunately, I had the chance to talk to the author, Ruth Kluger, in our classroom, and it is such an absolutely mind-blowing and unique way of re-telling that part of history. She doesn't intend to gain sympathy from the audience, but simply tells the story from her own unique perspectives that's resulted from her upbringing. Also, if you have the chance, you can read the German version of this book, because the English version is almost a re-writing of the book. (The targeting audience of the German version is Germans...)

Reading *Still Alive* was like having a conversation with someone I like and admire. A one-sided conversation, one might say, since Kluger was doing all the talking, and I was contributing nothing but my interpretation of her words. But Kluger answered many of the questions I would have asked, had she been sitting across from me. "What was it like after you escaped, when you were thrown in with Germans who were running from the approaching Allies? Did you talk to them?" I would have asked. "For them," she would have said, "it was despair, they were leaving behind everything; while

for me, it was joy, because I was gaining everything -- the rest of my life." (I am not quoting the exact words from the book here, but writing the general idea from memory). "Did the culture's attitude toward you as a woman make it more difficult to recover from the humiliation you suffered as a camp inmate?" "What was it like to go from being a very private child, to being crammed into a mass of other humans?" "How was your relationship with your mother after the war, after you grew up?" "What was it like going to a strange place, having to learn a new language, a new culture?" "How could you tolerate life as a U.S. housewife in the 1950's? Of course it was far better than life in the camps, but still ..."Kluger's personality comes across as irrepressible. Her book inspires me rather than depressing me. For example, having described her childhood compulsion to memorize poetry early in the book, Kluger mentions composing poems about the camps with (not so appropriate) catchy rhythms and rhymes, because it made them easier to memorize, and of course she had to commit them to memory since paper and writing implements were scarce, and anyhow, how else could one be sure of holding onto them? I smile as I remember that. Even as she starved for food and water, she found a way to create treasures that no one could take away from her, as long as she lived.I have to confess that I do not read German, so I would not be able to appreciate Dr. Kluger's literary criticism. I am sad that she has not published more poetry and observations of life.

I read this for my Holocaust and Humanities in the 21st Century class and it was by far my favorite book. I agree most with her take on exploitation of pain and politics of Europe - great read!

Story Hour Bible Comes Alive Series (Bible Comes Alive, 1) Dead or Alive (Plus Bonus Digital Copy of Dead or Alive) (Jack Ryan Series) Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought (Suny Series, Jewish Writings of Strauss) Understanding The Jesus Code: Unlocking Biblical Secrets So You Can Live Your Life Fully Alive (Living Fully Alive Book 1) Antigua, Barbuda, St. Kitts & Nevis Alive (Alive Guides) The Aruba, Bonaire & Curacao: Alive! (Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao Alive Guide) Aruba, Bonaire & Curacao Alive (Alive Guides) Martinque, Guadeloupe, Dominica and St. Lucia Alive! (Martinque, Guadeloupe, Dominica & St. Lucia Alive) The Martinique and Guadeloupe Alive! (Martinique & Guadeloupe Alive)