



Let Me Tell You a Story: A Memoir of a Wartime Childhood

Renata Calverley

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September, 1939. Przemysl, Poland. No one has explained to three-year-old Renatka what *war* is. She knows her Tatus, a doctor, is away with the Polish Army, that her beautiful Mamusia is no longer allowed to work at the university, and that their frequent visitors-among them Great Aunt Zuzia and Uncle Julek with their gifts of melon and clothes-have stopped appearing. One morning Mamusia comes home with little yellow six-pointed stars for them to wear. Renatka thinks they will keep her family safe.

In June of 1942, soldiers in gray-green uniforms take Renata, Mamusia, and grandmother Babcia to the Ghetto where they are crammed into one room with other frightened families. The adults are forced to work long hours at the factory and to survive on next to no food. One day Mamusia and Babcia do not return from their shifts.

Six years old and utterly alone, Renata is passed from place to place and survives through the willingness of ordinary people to take the most deadly risks. Her unlikely blonde hair and blue eyes and other twists of fate save her life but stories become her salvation. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales transport her to an enchanted world; *David Copperfield* helps her cope on her own; and she longs for the family in *Swallows and Amazons*.

A chronicle of the horrors of war, *Let Me Tell You a Story* is a powerful and moving memoir of growing up in a disturbing world, and of the magical discovery of books.

Let Me Tell You a Story: A Memoir of a Wartime Childhood Details

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From Reader Review Let Me Tell You a Story: A Memoir of a Wartime Childhood for online ebook

Linda Thompson says

As the story starts, Renata is a three year old Jewish girl living in a comfortably off family in Poland in 1939, and she recounts what happened to her throughout the Nazi purges and World War II.

Her sense of bewilderment about what war is and why people hate her even though she has done nothing wrong is heartbreaking. Telling herself the stories she heard in happier days with her family helps to comfort and support her, and when one of the many people who shelter her along the way (some out of love and some for money) teaches her to read, it opens up a whole new world to her.

This was a difficult book to read from the comfort of my armchair, as even though the terrible events of that time are well known, this very personal account, told by a very young child, gives a different perspective. I wish that we could have heard what happened to some of the other people- but maybe their fate, like that of so many others of that period - was never known.

Josie says

[Audobook version]

It was truly humbling how much effort so many people went to in order to save the life of one little Jewish girl -- putting their own lives at risk in the process -- but unfortunately the child's perspective that this is written from means that Renata never expresses any humility. I get that children can be selfish and rude without thinking, but even towards the end of the book Renata didn't seem to have matured or been changed by her experiences. The ungrateful way she brushed off her Aunt Zuzia made me feel sick.

Oh, and I found it strange that the end of the war was just brushed over? I don't remember it even being mentioned, and if it hadn't been for the chapter headings giving the date, I would have been confused as to why Renata had suddenly started school and was able to write to her father in the UK.

Shelly says

I know she was only 6, but I grew tired of her constantly whining to the people who risked their lives to protect her. She doesn't even acknowledge that she is the reason her aunt and cousin get killed. Didn't finish

Shariek Gohar says

Great read from a holocaust survivor

Loved the book. Drew me in right away. Cannot comprehend what Renata has gone through. Totally felt telling this story from the child's perspective, brought you closer to what she experienced. This will stay with

me for awhile.

Clarissa Slaton says

This book is the best book I have ever read! It is about a girl at the time the world war 2 started she was 6. This is her story of how she survived world war2.

Trina says

While her father is away as a doctor during the war, six year old Renata, her mother, and her grandmother are forced out of their apartment, in the middle of the night, and moved to the Ghetto. Not long after, her mother and grandmother are taken away for Auschwitz. Renata is passed from place to place and person to person as she is in hiding. This is her 6 year old view of what was happening. She can't understand what war is (she thinks all the bombs are thunder in a terrible storm), and why people hate her just because she's Jew (especially since her family wasn't very active in their religion).

Renata stayed true to telling the story through her childhood eyes, but gave enough detail that, as an adult, you could tell what must have been happening at the time. The end dragged a bit for me, but it gave a nice wrap up to how her wartime childhood came to a close.

Ambika says

This book is so good that it got me reading chapter after chapter by the hour, and it was really hard to keep a tab on it via GoodReads, so I'm just going to keep this as my daily-read book and start on another book I will use only for SSR. So in a very simple manner, this book is a memoir of a woman named Renata who when she was a young child had a very difficult childhood. She was smuggled from the Jewish ghetto by her German nanny, Marynia, after her grandma and mother were taken to Auschwitz camp (most likely to be killed by gassing upon arrival). B/c Marynia and her husband are pretending to be on the Nazi side, it is not very safe for Renata to stay at their house b/c soldiers often visit them (even though Renata is a Jewess who has "Aryan" features--blonde hair, blue eyes). From Marynia's house she is moved to another house. This house belongs to a man named Maciej and his wife, Jadwiga (although Jadwiga doesn't live there) and the housekeeper, Hanka. Through Renata's innocent child perspective, readers find out dark and troubling secrets. Renata appears to lead a very nomadic childhood life. I really like this book a) b/c it's an historical novel and b) the story itself is very informative, well-written, and incredibly deep.

Claire says

Listened to this. It was inspiring and sad and quite amazing to hear.

Marka says

Very moving.

Paula Ross says

I wish the end didn't have such a quick wrap up. But it was good.

Bree says

Less "A memoir of a wartime childhood" and more "a childhood that happened to occur during wartime". While the war definitely frames Renata's life and dictates where she gets sent and how often, ultimately her recollection is that of a very young child that didn't understand what war was and therefore just ran about acting quite spoiled and constantly deciding she hated everyone that wouldn't give her everything she wanted.

I know that some people have a very good memory of their childhood, but the level of detail here is almost impossible to believe, which also made me side-eye the story the entire time.

Maggie says

This book filled my heart/the empty space in my chest with joy **at all the strong women working alongside another, pulling strings and drawing up plans, all to save and protect the life of one small child.**

Here they are:

Tosia, the comforting woman known to Renata as Mamusia.

Babcia, whose kindness was overwhelming.

Janka, a young woman who found strength and shed light in the dark camps.

Marynia, a worker of miracles that saved Renata's life.

Aunt Adela and her daughter Zazula, creating a safe haven for Renata at the risk -- and ultimately, expense -- of their lives.

Frederika, whose confidence and wit made her an absolute legend.

Hanka, whose character development within such a short time was truly inspiring.

Jadwiga, the embodiment of a hard woman with a soft heart.

Basia and Cesia, orphan sisters with big hearts and quick minds.

Božena, who never took anything for granted and passed on this wisdom to Renata.

Božena's aunt, who even at her old age sacrificed time and hard work for a girl she did not know.

The librarian, teaching the importance of books and encouraging the love of reading.

Aunt Zuzia, who did everything she could to raise Renata as a happy child.

There were countless other women whose stories never intersected Renata's, but they should be honored, nameless though they may be.

The men who fought tirelessly during World War II are remembered and praised, and rightfully so. **This book has opened my eyes to the women who worked behind the scenes, under cover of the night, and now it is time to give them proper acknowledgment.**

Ellen Pilch says

This book was fantastic even though it gave me nightmares. My heart broke again and again for poor little Renata as she kept getting moved from place to place. I am amazed at how resilient she was throughout her ordeal during WW II.

This poor little girl gradually lost everything , including most of her family at the tender age of 6. It is so sad that the people that helped her for the most part, did it for money. I was hoping there were nicer people back then, but I guess mankind never changes.

My only issue was the end, I have so many questions. I want to know if she ever saw her Aunt and Uncle again. I also want to know what happened to her nanny that was arrested for trying to help a little Jewish boy. I also would love to know if she is Jewish or Catholic now.

I am glad she finally told her story as it should never be forgotten. I wish everyone could have told theirs. I highly recommend this book.

One more issue- the ink smells bad, I have never had that problem with a book.

lavinia says

I got this book from Krakow. I have to admit I didn't do much research before choosing this particular one, I just wanted to read some memoir from WWII in that part of the world. Because the memories belong to a very young child, they're a bit different from what I was expecting. In short, Renata had a looot of luck and many many people who did their best to keep her alive. At times she seemed ungrateful and unaware, but, well, she was only a child.

If you ever feel that you need to read something to be grateful for your life, then read this book. It will make you never want to complain about the small stuff ever again.

Lavinia Petrache says

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