



# Anya

*Susan Fromberg Schaeffer*

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**Anya Karinsky's beautiful life seemed like one long and perfect dream that would spin on forever.**

But her wonderful world of dances, travel, medical school, and her beloved family ended one day late in the summer of 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland. The bombs that leveled her Warsaw home that day marked the beginning of her soul-stirring odyssey of endurance and escape, through years of horror and Holocaust. Strong when others grew weak, selfless in pursuit of freedom, Anya, once the beautiful, pampered daughter of privilege, turned herself into a survivor whom nothing and no one could destroy.

"A triumph of realism in art." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"*Anya* is a myth, an epic, the creation of darkness and of laughter stopped forever...A vision, set down by a fearless, patient poet...A writer of remarkable power." —*The Washington Post*

## Anya Details

Date : Published February 17th 2004 by W. W. Norton Company (first published 1974)

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Author : Susan Fromberg Schaeffer

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## From Reader Review Anya for online ebook

### Tim says

I don't know if the publisher was scrimping on printing costs but the type of the edition I read was so small it hurt my eyes - and add to that the dialogue isn't broken up by new paragraphs when a new speaker talks and what you get are huge blocks of typescript on every page. The most reader unfriendly novel I've ever read. Printed in a normal size font and with conventional paragraph breaks this book would probably run to at least 700 pages. Way too long, in other words.

The danger signs are there from the beginning – endless descriptions of furniture and clothes. I understand all these things were to vanish as 1939 approached and the author felt duty-bound to catalogue them all but I still couldn't help thinking a better novelist would have been more selective – less is often more after all. The part depicting life in the ghetto was moving but by now I was beginning to have a problem with the tone of the narrative voice – it was too cajoling, too keen to entertain, too whimsical at times for the gravity of the subject. One of the discussion questions at the back of this book states that many people argue the Holocaust is not a subject for a work of fiction and I think I may be one of those. Unless perhaps the author shows subtle artistry in composing his or her novel. Schindler's List is so moving because it's true; were it fiction it might, ironically, be offensive. Anya is not a true story. It's essentially an old fashioned conventional narrative – its prime purpose is to entertain in the way 19th century novels set out to do. And because it's not a true story suspension of disbelief is another huge problem. Anya just has too much good luck. When I read an account of Jews hiding in Berlin it was very clear you needed good luck as a constant companion to survive but none of those real life people were blessed with the relentless good fortune enjoyed by Anya.

I have to confess I began skim reading it around page 300 and finally gave up. Not for me.

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### Lee says

This book drove me crazy. I would probably rate the first couple hundred pages with 2 stars, maybe only 1. Her writing style drove me crazy, especially with tiny print and long paragraphs. It was so disjointed and confusing--I practically itched reading it and it took me months to get through it. I nearly put it down several times. Then once the war started I definitely felt more engaged even though it often still jumped around. Her experience was horrific and in such contrast to the pre-war days of being frivolous and spoiled. It is hard to imagine living through the experience of being constantly hunted, going to unbelievable measures to stay alive and to have most of everyone you know and love captured and killed. I was moved. I would probably give the middle couple hundred pages 3 stars for writing style and 5 for content. Then oddly the last couple hundred of pages it seemed to me that it was less disjointed and more flowing. I don't know if I got used to Schaeffer or if it really changed. The first part of her epilogue was some of the most profound writing I have ever read. She talked about how her war experience made it impossible for her to have a normal human experience for the rest of her life, her struggles with her daughter, for whom she sacrificed the unimaginable to keep alive during the war.

One thing that really stands out for me in this story is the nearly complete absence of Hitler's name until the epilogue, only 2 maybe 3 times did I see it. Somehow that struck me profoundly.

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## **Evi says**

As other reviewers have mentioned, this was a difficult book to read. The writing style was difficult, including tiny print and long paragraphs. At times it was a bit disjointed and confusing. It took me a long time to get through this book, but I'm glad I stayed with it. As a lover of Holocaust books, this was one of the best. It was an amazing story of Anya's life as a Holocaust survivor.

It was a bit long-winded in parts and I found myself rereading passages again and again. Some paragraphs ramble on while two, three or even four people are all talking.

The author spends the first two chapters describing the beautiful house where Anya grew up. At the time you wonder why all this is being told, but it all comes around and you realize how horrific her later life became.

This book will go up on the shelf to be read again.

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## **Diane says**

[ which took me through to the character's immigration to the United States (hide spoiler)]

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## **Mary says**

I read this book many years ago as a teenager. It's a book that takes some concentration to get through with achingly long descriptions. However, without the descriptions you cannot appreciate the rest. This was the first book I had ever read about the Holocaust. It is very vivid and your mind's eye opens to place you with Anya throughout her life. Her suffering is shocking and yet many other details remind you she is more than a victim. You follow her from childhood through adulthood with a daughter of her own. In all the years since I first read it, I have never forgotten this story or her name, Anya. A few years ago, my daughter brought home a bag of books her school was discarding. She can't stand to see books without a home! And as I looked through her treasures, Anya came back into my life! I have not read it again, but I intend to. It is a chore and wreaks havoc on your emotions. But I felt that I was welcoming an old friend back into my home. Thank you Hyle (my daughter), for bringing her back!

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## **``Laurie Henderson says**

If you are in the mood for a good book of drama/action/adventure then Anya might be the book for you.

I first read Anya many years ago and this gripping book has stuck with me ever since.

Meet Anya, an innocent, young, Polish Jewish woman trying to survive WW2 and the holocaust as she meets

one horrible obstacle to survival after another.

I marveled at her ingenuity and watched her grow from helpless victim to determined survivor.

This is one of those older books that has probably been forgotten by now but I do think it's worth giving a try.

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### **Linda Branham Greenwell says**

The story is about a Russian Jewish family that moved to Poland a few years before the 2nd-world war. Their life was genteel and wonderful and each member of the family was so caring and thoughtful to each other and their relatives. Then came the Nazi's and imprisonment, and for most death.

Anya and her child survive, and they are the only survivors from her family. Anya had to search for her daughter after the war and finally found her. But the striking thing about the novel is the 'based on fact' atrocities performed by the Nazi's. Anya's heroic struggle just to survive and the strong determination she had to search and find her daughter, who was snatched-up by one of the Nazi officer's to become his and his wife's child.

The author does a wonderful job of showing us, through Anya, the horrors of that time

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

This was a wonderful, epic type novel, taking place during the holocaust. The main protagonist is a young educated Jewish woman, and it's about all that she goes through before, during, and after the Nazi regime. It was really gripping and suspenseful and I cared about her and some of the other characters also. One of my favorite novels.

On my latest reread:

It's always hardest for me to review the books I love the most. I first read this book in about 1976, and had read it another time or two or three before I recently buddy read it with my Goodreads' friend, Diane, her first time reading it.

It's still one of my favorite novels. The narrator and title character is so compelling, as are many of the characters. They're so relatable. The main character does a remarkable job of storytelling. I was completely riveted, and so much happens on every page. The writing is wonderful, making me feel as though I was right there.

Reading it in my 60s vs. in my 20s gave me a whole new perspective about the events and people. Interestingly, I forgot a lot, even though it has always made a huge impression on me. I'd intended to skim along, but quickly changed and read the book, partly because I quickly realized I'd forgotten a lot but mostly because I wanted to once again immerse myself in the story; I couldn't pull away from it.

It's a real gem. I think it's brilliant in so many ways. I'm very grateful to have reread it and to be able to discuss it with someone who's new to it. I had discussed it with one or two friends when I first read it too, but that was a long time ago. It's a great book for discussion.

Reading it now I understand why my friends and I in our twenties maybe were able to get a bit of understanding and patience about our parents, not that our parents went through even close to what Anya goes through.

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### **Susan Harkins says**

Read it when it first came out and it remains to this day as one of my favorites.

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### **Chrissie says**

#### **NO SPOILERS**

Finished: Most of us have read about the genocide of Jews in WW2, so why read another book on this subject? What will it give the reader that the others haven't? First of all the crimes of WW2 are just so mind boggling that there is no definitive answer. There is always more to consider. I will say it right off, it was the author's style of writing that made this book different from the others I have read. I enjoyed the mix of happiness and unbelievable horror. I cannot swallow JUST horror. It goes against my principles. We must look for happiness in the small things making up a part of our daily life. I enjoyed the Russian folk tales. I thought the use of 1st person narrative was perfect for this book. Why? Well because this book is about how the war experiences shaped Anya. The point is to see HER point of view. To see it from the inside. I have never read a book that so clearly depicted life in a Jewish ghetto. From this ghetto some were sent for immediate extermination, others were sent to places like Auschwitz. But here you see what life was like in the GHETTO. It is a very intimate portrayal. You see how some go under, while others fight and struggle to survive. How some can still look up at the moon or observe a child and become happy. Even if it is only a momentary happiness. For some the struggle even makes them stronger individuals. Others, no. And that is the next issue of this book. What happens afterwards. Why do we all react so differently?

The book is about what life does to people. Why do some people shine when they have a problem to deal with, and then later, when the problem is gone, they dissolve? Why can some break with the past and others can never, ever, forget the past? Rather than going on and evolving further, we are stuck and cannot let go of our memories? Is it that we are no longer in control, that it is our children's turn at shaping the future? So the puff is gone? Additionally, this book makes one think about the parent-child relationship over a lifetime.

Please check some of the quotes below, to see if YOU like the writer's style. Some might object to a dialogue being presented in one paragraph. I liked it. You feel you are there, on the side, listening.

One thing I forgot to say, so I am adding it now. It is very interesting to compare how Anya and Tuvia in *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Built a Village in the Forest, and Saved 1,200 Jews* behaved after the war.

I am on page 306-307 now. That point in the novel where I felt the plot line was not possible, was very brief. Now we are back on firm ground again. Now you must know by now that Anya is Jewish and she is trying to live through WW2. You know times are bad, so much more bad than what you or I experience daily. Nevertheless, the author makes Anya's response to her troubles something the reader can relate to. She is FED UP. She has had it! She just cannot take any more of the crap being thrown at her..... And this is

something you and I and most readers can understand. You will recognize your own emotions in the way Anya is feeling. You will recognize your own way of responding to life's punches in the way Anya responds. If you read the book, remember page 306, when she is traveling to Minsk in a train and is speaking to a fellow Russian..... I bet you will feel as I do - that Anya's response to life's bumps are universal. Somehow Anya's huge problems are made intimate, something all readers can relate to. I love Mrs. Lichkov. Some people are kind! Sometimes people, a person you met just an instant ago, are so sweet.

Through page 278: I still am enjoying Anya, BUT somehow I never think fiction is quite as good as biographies. No, maybe that isn't true. ...Right at this instant it is very, very scary. I am wondering if it would play out this way in real life. I thought I should add that to my review..... On the other hand the lines continue to grab me. The characters, well Ninka I simply adore. Because I love her to pieces, I am also brought to tears, but I cannot tell you why without spoiling this for those who haven't read the book. One minute I am laughing and then the next my eyes are flooding over.

Through page 183: If you have glanced at a synopsis of this book, you know the hard times come. The reader finds himself there, inside a Polish ghetto. You are there. The dirt, the grime the disease, the fear, the scramble for food and the bickering. Humanity at its lowest. Now also diptheria and typhoid:

"So there was something new not to worry about."(pager 183)

What do you tell yourself to keep going?

"'When it is over, we'll forget,' X says. 'And how will I forget my father?' B cried out bitterly. 'If you are thinking about your father, what about my whole family?' There was not a sound from M. 'Are we going to start competing over tradegies?'

Until now, I have never truely felt myself there, living in a Polish ghetto. BUT in all this misery, there are things to laugh about too. That is why the reader can keep his head afloat. In addition, the evolving relationship between the peasants and former servants to those in the Jewish ghetto is worth observing.

Through page 116: What am I suppose to do to get you guys, my GR friends, to read this book. I swear you are totally, totally missing out on a wonderful experience. PLEASE read this book. So I mark on the sides bits I could quote for my review..... but there are paragraphs on every page. What?! Am I suppose to copy the whole book? Read it for the experience of tasting Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's writing. Read it to ponder on life's wisdom and downfall and fate. Read it to meet Anya. Read it to meet her Poppa and Momma. Do you hear me? Read it! I cannot make you read this book, but you are the one missing out if you don't. Maybe it is not for you if you do not like the lines I have quoted....

Through page 69: I absolutely love this book! I love the writing. the story which IS a rather grim one, although not yet, is told as a first person narrative. Anya is funny and her Russian family feels so real and so cozy and so - well they say everything just the way it is. No secrets. It is simply how things are said that makes this story so wonderful. I am sure when the hard times hit, Anya will have the gumption and the strength to fight back. She has pzazz. She has been accepted into medical school, and this is quite exceptional because she is Jewish and a girl. The dialogue while they are dissecting body is hilarious. They are dissecting the cadaver's penis. Read the book to find out.

Anyway, she is too skinny so her Momma has seen to it that her winter vacation would be spent in the resort town Zakopanie in the Karpat Mountains - sunbathing in the snow, partying, sleigh-rides and eating. "The next day we went all over the valleys in a sleigh, and no matter where we stopped I ate as much as I could. It

was a good thing that they turned out to be the millionaire's sons." (page 57) Well here, in her own words, is the result:

"So I came home all brown, absolutely like chocolate; nobody could call me green, but the guiltiest person, the guiltiest person alive. I had gained only 27 pounds, the closer we got to the station, the guiltier I felt. (She was suppose to gain 40 lbs.) I was so guilty, and the train was pulling into the station and there was Momma. I snuck up to her, but she didn't recognize me; I had gained so much weight. So she decided I had eaten enough. 'Can I stop the sour cream?' I asked. 'Please,' she answered, eyeing me critically, and immediately in the drozhka on the way home it was 'tell me, tell me.' 'Fat!' Mischa (younger brother)screamed. 'Juicy!' Momma contradicted. 'What did she do? Eat all the snow in the mountains? Emmanuel (older brother) asked. 'I don't like it,' he judged, on his way out somewhere. 'How much weight did you gain?' Momma asked. 'Only 27 pounds,' I admitted guiltily. 'Ah,' Momma sighed with satisfaction. 'I thought if I told you to gain forty, you would accomplish at least half of what I asked.'"

"But of course then it was medical school and I began shrinking like an icicle in the sun, and no one would believe my tan was natural, but said it had come from a box....." (page 57-58)

I absolutely adore the writing. What is interesting is that from the prologue you know that Anya is dead. She is living in Vilno(Vilnius), which was at that time Polish. The family is Russian.

BEFORE STARTING: Lisa, the little bit I read was fabulous. This will be a high priority read!

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## **Chris says**

Disappointed. This is absolutely my kind of book and I was very keen to read it. While some might consider holocaust or other survivor manuscripts morbid, I feel we can learn a lot from what people went through and how they endured. It can help sometimes put our own issues into better context. Given all the five star reviews I settled down to read Anya with anticipation. I ended up dragging myself through to the end and finishing it with great relief so I could move on to something else. First off, the first section is a very elaborate and immensely detailed description of her life before the war. I can understand that this context is to juxtapose this against what comes after but I found myself waiting for the real story to start and getting more and more fed up reading instead wordy stories of her princess lifestyle before the war. Example, almost an entire chapter relates how she saw a bed set she loved but the person wouldn't tell her where she got it .... then how she got that person to tell her and how she then ordered this special bed .... yawn. Not necessary for the story even in context setting.

The second problem I think is the authors style. As she starts to relay the terrible events of the war years I found it very difficult to relate to her. She seems somehow aloof from the events and the focus of what she chooses to describe is sometimes strange. Example: during her imprisonment in a concentration camp she gets a very lucky break in being pulled out to work inside cleaning a house. The way she describes that and the issues she focuses on during that time just seem very strange. Perhaps she just shied away from sharing the worst horrors she saw?

Anyway, I seem to be in a minority but I found this book hard to get through and an unsatisfying read.

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## **Tracie Donnell says**

I first read this in about 1977, and it has returned to me many times over the years. I recently rediscovered it and read the 485 pages in 3 days. It remains THE best novel on the Holocaust I've ever read. Not overly graphic in the details, but so powerful you feel as if you are in every moment with the characters.

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## **Mscarolyn says**

This is an exquisitely written, lovingly detailed literary feast -- the setting is drawn down to the last detail, beautiful and jewel-like -- and then smashed like an eggshell in the unfolding of the novel's events. Beautiful and harrowing and eye-opening. A must-read.

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## **Jennyb says**

It is possible that I take things too seriously sometimes, and I need to lighten up in my overly earnest assessments of books I read. That said, I expect serious fiction to be serious, and if you choose to write a novel about the Holocaust, you'd better be as damn serious as a heart attack. In Anya, Susan Fromberg Schaeffer isn't. In fact, have never read such a superficial and unfeeling book about the Holocaust, to the point where I don't just dislike this brainless account of the event, I am offended by it.

The book starts off all right, introducing us to a privileged Russian family living in Poland before the war. Two hundred pages about dresses, and jewelry, and hair and dates and boys... all right, you've set the scene. But from the advent of the war on, this just gets worse and worse. Each unrealistic and inconsistent page becomes increasingly torturous, and my edition had a 616 pages in 6 or 8 point font. This book is wrong in so many ways, I can't fathom why I persisted. Here are some of the more annoying points.

The titular character Anya is supposed to be inordinately close to her family members, but when every single one of them dies -- some practically before her eyes -- she gives hardly another thought to mother, father, brothers, sister, in-laws, or even her husband once they're gone. Little agonizing, little grief... but how about seven pages of text about rubble and ruined buildings in Warsaw after the war?

If Anya has little difficulty forgetting about everyone who was close to her, she thinks a lot of herself, you may be sure. In fact, so bewitching is our Anya, we are to believe that no one can resist her: every Nazi she encounters wants to be kind to her and help ease her troubles, help her escape. As a result, one day she just walks out of a concentration camp. If my grasp of history serves, had it been as easy to leave as checking out of a hotel, I doubt 6 million people would have stuck around to die.

Thereafter, our irresistible Anya waltzes through a series of happy coincidences: she meets up with old friends and relatives just when she needs them to give her clothes, food, money, jobs and apartments, and visas to travel to America. She even finds her lost daughter with a minimum of effort, after a search of a day or two.

We spend too much time being reminded how beautiful our narrator is, how with her blond hair and bright blue eyes, she is often mistaken for a movie star, but never a Jew, oh no! Also, she's as tiny as a doll... except for her ample and irresistible breasts. Since the novel's setting is a genocidal war, you might think the this

detail would fade into the background, but Schaeffer never lets us forget it, also repeating brainlessly how a woman must always look her best. You'll be surprised how often Anya -- and others -- have little of greater importance to think about than her giant breasts and her appearance. To wit, the time when a doctor is going to lance a boil under Anya's arm: she is stripped to the waist, when the amorous doctor can't prevent himself from observing "You're not so little after all," with a (presumably lecherous) smile. All I can say to this is: are you even fucking serious?

Over the hundreds of pages of this novel, what such inane writing does is to diminish the real experience of the Holocaust, both for those who died and those who lived. People didn't go waltzing out of the camps, they died in them, by their millions. People didn't encounter kind Nazis anxious to ease their suffering, if they weren't gassed at the entrance or shot on sight, they were starved to the verge of death and worked like animals until they dropped to the ground. They didn't bump into friends and relatives for happy reunions around every corner at the end of the war, those lucky enough to live learned that they lost their loved ones in the most gruesome manner imaginable, if they could even find out about their fates.

The utter disregard of reality demonstrated by this book disparages the true horror that victims and survivors of the Holocaust experienced. It is frivolous in the face of one of the most grave events of modern Western history, which I find unpardonably disrespectful. As a result, I would not recommend Anya to anyone -- if you are going to read about this subject, either read an account from a survivor, like Imre Kertesz, Primo Levi or Elie Weisel, or a victim like Anne Frank. The contrast between serious fiction and Schaeffer's Anya highlights the disservice Schaeffer has perpetuated by treating a horrific genocide as though it were just one more of life's pesky inconveniences.

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## **Tonya says**

I never thought I would give a 2-star rating to an epic WWII novel, but look at me now! As I read a lot of other reviews of this book, I noticed that a lot of readers mentioned they read it in school back in the 70's and 80's. I think that for those purposes, it would be a good way to expose students to a lot of the harsh realities of the horrors of the Holocaust. HOWEVER, as for me, being someone who has read more than a few novels/nonfiction accounts on this topic, I found this FICTIONAL work about Jews in Poland during WWII just not believable. I couldn't help but feel like I was reading the horrific, sadistic war epic version of FORREST GUMP. That's right, I'm comparing this book to Forrest Gump. And I stand by that comparison. Because really, throughout this entire story, the main character's luck just got more and more unbelievable. Everywhere she went, every near-death experience she had, SOMEHOW just the right person she used to know would come along and save her. Or some guy would fall in love with her beauty and save her. In a nonfiction account this would be fabulous to follow along with. But I felt like the author really grasped at straws to tie all the different storylines of WWII together, and she didn't make it very believable. Add that to the fact that it literally took me 4 months to get through the first 150 pages (it takes THAT long for anything to actually happen in the plot), and you have the two stars.

There were still plenty of good things about this book, don't get me wrong. (It didn't get ONE star!!) This was the first I read about the Jewish ghettos and also about much of the aftermath that Jewish survivors went through trying to make lives for themselves AFTER the war was over. Schaeffer did a good job of laying out how completely obliterated most of the survivor's lives were after the war. And I'm sure she did take from a lot of real-life experiences.

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