



# My Real Name Is Hanna

*Tara Lynn Masih*

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**My Real Name Is Hanna** Tara Lynn Masih

**Inspired by real Holocaust events, this poignant debut novel is a powerful coming-of-age story that will resonate with fans of *The Book Thief* and *Between Shades of Gray*.**

Hanna Slivka is on the cusp of fourteen when Hitler's army crosses the border into Soviet-occupied Ukraine. Soon, the Gestapo closes in, determined to make the *shtetle* she lives in "free of Jews." Until the German occupation, Hanna spent her time exploring Kwasova with her younger siblings, admiring the drawings of the handsome Leon Stadnick, and helping her neighbor dye decorative *pysanky* eggs. But now she, Leon, and their families are forced to flee and hide in the forest outside their *shtetle*—and then in the dark caves beneath the rolling meadows, rumored to harbor evil spirits. Underground, they battle sickness and starvation, while the hunt continues above. When Hanna's father disappears, suddenly it's up to Hanna to find him—and to find a way to keep the rest of her family, and friends, alive.

Sparse, resonant, and lyrical, weaving in tales of Jewish and Ukrainian folklore, *My Real Name Is Hanna* celebrates the sustaining bonds of family, the beauty of a helping hand, and the tenacity of the human spirit.

## My Real Name Is Hanna Details

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Author : Tara Lynn Masih

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# From Reader Review *My Real Name Is Hanna* for online ebook

**Amalia Gavea says**

*‘As good as life looks now to us young children, there is still a sense of always looking over your shoulder for something to hit you.’*

This is one of the most beautiful books of the year. Based on the true story of a Jewish family living in Ukraine during the darkest period in History, the Second World War, it is a story of fear and struggle for survival, a fight for dignity and hope that refuse to be persecuted and die. Through the eyes of Hanna, a 14-year-old girl, we find ourselves in the beautiful, haunting Ukrainian forests in a time, when the dark clouds of fascism have covered the world.

Hanna's land becomes a trapped, helpless animal in the hands of the worst powers in European History, the Nazis and the Soviets. Under Stalin, every religion is forbidden. A good, useful member of the "community" is made to show obedience to the State. Exclusively. Nothing else is sacred. There is no way out for the people and strife leads them to believe that the Nazis will be able to make things better. So, on the one side, Hitler is waiting. On the other, Stalin is in power. The country is trapped between two insane tyrants.

The dark atmosphere is interrupted by the beautiful descriptions of a nature that is both mesmerizing and unsettling. It will soon be destroyed by the black boots of demons. It was a relief and a joy to read about the traditions, the customs, the prayers of the Jewish community. The folktales shared by grandmothers and mothers to the new generations, tales of courage that help them stand as bravely as they can. There are also extensive references to the pagan traditions of the land, before the coming of Christianity, particularly reflected in the Easter customs. Even the nightly forest, dark and full of dangers, holds a certain appeal. Tara Lynn Masih painted a background that is menacing and fascinating.

*‘Someday, someone will betray us. For money, for food, for their own lives spared.’*

The worst consequence of war is the way in which communities are torn apart. People who used to live together in peace and understanding become enemies prepared to jump at their neighbour's throat. There is a particularly striking scene in which an old poster of Stalin is covered by a brand new poster of Hitler. For me, it was the saddest moment in the story, showing the lack of any kind of escape for the citizens. Another memorable moment -out of many- is the sequence of atrocities carried out as the immortal creations of Bach and Beethoven are echoing like a soundtrack from Hell. I don't know whether this is historically accurate but it definitely makes you wonder how war destroys every sense of beauty and dignity and kindness in enemies and victims alike.

*‘Home is where you are safe.’*

Masih does a wonderful job in creating a claustrophobic, threatening atmosphere throughout the story. The nightmare of living in constant fear, waiting for that knock on the door that will lead you to Hell. The prejudice, the deliberate spreading of hostility against innocent people, how Populism always finds the soil to grow when the economic situation is shaky and no country is immune to this vile disease.

In my opinion, this novel is on par with *Between Shades of Gray*. Perhaps, even better. The characters are extremely well-written and the writer didn't resort to overtly violent descriptions for shock value. There is

violence and cruelty but in a way that isn't gory. There is no need for over-the-top descriptions. We all know what happened. We all know what war brings, even the fortunate generations that had no first-hand experience of what war really means. Still, there is hope. Every war eventually ends and nations that once were enemies now work together for peace and prosperity. This is how it should be. History should help us remember so as not to repeat the wrongs of the past. It isn't there to prolong enmities between countries for all eternity. This is the only way to create some kind of sense in this tortured world....

Many thanks to Mandel Vilar Press and NetGalley for the ARC in exchange for an honest review.

My reviews can also be found on <https://theopinionatedreaderblog.wordpress.com>...

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## Cheri says

*"Dance me to the children who are asking to be born  
Dance me through the curtains that our kisses have outworn  
Raise a tent of shelter now, though every thread is torn  
Dance me to the end of love"*  
--*Dance Me to the End of Love*, Leonard Cohen, Songwriters: Leonard Cohen

**"I will say my real name to you for the first time. Hanna Slivka. Don't be scared. I am still your mother. Born on February twenty-second, in the winter of 1928. Your grandmother often told me to remember this date because that is the day that God allowed me into this world to breathe my first soul breath of chilled Ukrainian air. "**

**"She told me all this as we sat in fear for our lives in the dark. That our people believe the breath of life—*neshamah*—is holy. That she could see snow falling outside the window, great big flakes like goose feathers. And a bantam cock crowed, she said, as if to welcome me."**

**"My family told stories. We swallowed them in place of food and water. Stories kept us alive in our underground sanctuary. The world continued to carry out its crimes above us, while we fought just to remain whole below."**

Sharing this story with her daughter, now, from when this begins in May of 1941, she shares this story with us, as readers, her personal petition that this story, their family story, be held in her daughter's memories.

Life in Kwasova in the days before the war was simple and good, with their life filled with the daily rituals, the small tasks throughout the day, and prayer. But life changes as often as their country's borders change, and historically they have been Ukrainian, Polish or Austrian citizens. On the day that Hitler invades, the 1st of September 1939, they are Polish, and the border is now down the middle of Poland. As the Nazis take over, hostility toward Jews increases, the number of people they can trust decreases, and by 1942, life is unsustainable there, and they make plans to leave, but it takes time to gather that which they hope to keep, and what they, reluctantly, must leave behind.

They leave their home on October 12th of 1942, with Hanna leaving a note that includes all of their names, including their dog and horse, and the ages of the children, asking the person who finds this list to please say these names out loud, and then bury the paper in the yard.

Once they leave, their journey is fraught with problems that start out small and few between, but as time goes by, and food is scarce or impossible to find. Shelter that they once had they are forced to leave until they seek shelter in a cave. Knowing the alternatives, there are few complaints at first, but as time goes by, the effects of living like this begin to take a toll.

While the Nazi Camps are mentioned, the focus of this story is on this one extended family and their fight for survival in a story that is incredibly compelling, but without the descriptions of the horrors we have all come to know of by reading about the Holocaust.

This is categorized as a Teens & Young-Adult novel, but can be appreciated by all ages.

It is also worth noting that this story was inspired by Esther Stermer's "*No Place on Earth*", a documentary, based on the true story Ms. Stermer's book "*We Fight to Survive*." A quote by her follows a dedication at the start of this book:

*"Long ago, people believed that spirits and ghosts lived in the ruins and caves. Now we could see that there were none here. The devils and evil spirits were on the outside, not in the grotto."* -- Esther Stermer, author of "*We Fight to Survive*."

Pub Date: 25 Sep 2018

Many thanks for the ARC provided by Mandel Vilar Press

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## **Tara says**

Winner of a 2018 SKIPPING STONES HONOR AWARD, this is my first novel for young readers and adults, inspired by real events. Five years of research and writing went into *My Real Name Is Hanna*, inspired by a family who sought refuge in the gypsum caves of Ukraine during the Holocaust. The book, with its gorgeous cover and interior, is due out early Sept. 2018!

"Hanna's story . . . uncovers an astonishing, rich vein of hope in a world gone utterly dark. The anguish and love painted here are both timeless and timely."

—Elizabeth Wein, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Code Name Verity*

"Tara Lynn Masih's lovely, lyrical novel made me feel like I was reading a part of my parents' story that I'd neglected to write . . . a worthy addition to the canon of Holocaust literature for young readers. As fine, delicate, and artful as a painted pysanka egg."

—Helen Maryles Shankman, author of *They Were Like Family to Me*, 2016 Story Prize finalist

"It's said the Holocaust defies imagination. Tara Lynn Masih defies that notion. *My Real Name Is Hanna* is a powerful, revelatory leap of imagination, taking readers on a journey with 14-year-old Hanna from the slowly enveloping horror of the Holocaust, to the literal and spiritual depths of being buried alive . . . An unforgettable odyssey."

? Greg Dawson, author of *Hiding in the Spotlight: A Musical Prodigy's Story of Survival*

“A gripping story of courage and endurance in the face of Nazi terror . . . My Real Name Is Hanna is a book that lives with you long after you have turned the final page.”

–Diney Costeloe, best-selling author of *The Girl with No Name*

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## Carol says

**"I am no longer afraid to walk in the dark."**

In **MY REAL NAME IS HANNA**, a bright, courageous and clever young (*soon to be*) 14 year old narrates the story of her loving Jewish family as they navigate through the **dangerous** and **deadly** times of the holocaust. The Slivka's are good, caring people who don't harm anyone....just want to live in peace....but that is not to be.

As rumors of a Nazi invasion to a remote Ukraine strengthen, escape is the only answer to stay together....stay alive....or die on their own terms. Uprooted from their beloved home, papa Abram and mama Eva leave family and friends behind, gather together their three children and head off to a small cabin deep in the woods....until they must move on again....until intense **fear** take them into complete darkness. Oh. My. Gosh.

While times are **dark** and struggles unending, there is love, hope and many kindnesses exchanged within the gripping pages of this relatively short novel. Special friends, meaningful tales, and *oh that secret message tree* make for an extraordinary and timely story for both young and old alike.

**MY REAL NAME IS HANNA** is a work of fiction inspired by some true life experiences of a **horrific** past not to be forgotten, and yet another reminder of how prejudice can lead to a hate filled society of violence and death.

Many thanks to author Tara Lynn Masih, and Mandel Vilar Press via NetGalley for the arc **COMING SEPTEMBER 11, 2018** in exchange for review.

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## Katie says

A problem I often have with Holocaust fiction is a tendency on the author's part to depict all Jews as saints. It's an understandable stance given what horrors they had to go through but it often doesn't make for compelling or sometimes even credible nuanced adult fiction (I'm thinking of *The Invisible Bridge* and *We Were the Lucky Ones*). We're asked to sympathise with a cast of idealised characters who perhaps belong more to a fairy story than a novel. An easy way around this problem perhaps is to acknowledge the parameters and prerequisites of fairy story (or YA novel as the fairy story has broadly become). This Tara Masih accomplishes really well. We've got an idealised mother, father, brother and sister but because the author has admirable consistent control of her register they don't grate. She's diligently aware of the fairy story element and without ever forcing it allows it to permeate throughout. Thus all the dialogue, all the emotions, all the characters are crafted to a child's understanding. And she deploys really well magical emblems, another important facet of the fairy story. Here we have a witness tree, the painted egg and the motanky dolls. The forest in the novel is a fairy story forest, magically described, and the evil is largely

invisible, an ominous haunting presence just beyond the horizon.

I also enjoyed the honest and moving afterword the author writes.

I didn't quite love this as much as most of my friends here (I think I'll always favour Holocaust memoirs over Holocaust novels) but I found it much more accomplished and moving than other novels I've read on the subject.

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## **Felicia says**

"It's ok to cry, Hanna...crying is a form of breathing."

\*ugly sobbing\* ?

Narrated in the voice of 14 year old Hanna, My Real Name is Hanna is the true story of a Jewish family on their quest for survival in the Ukraine during the Holocaust. The family eventually takes refuge in underground caves leaving them to try to make some semblance of a life while being cast in complete and total darkness.

"What is it like to take your last breath? What if the sound of it gave you away?"

\*more ugly sobbing\* ??

This is a powerful story about family, hope and ultimately the goodness of mankind.

?????

I was provided an ARC of this book by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Sue says**

My Real Name is Hanna is a book that has come at the right time, a time when we all, young and old, need to be reminded of the cost of evil on and in society. We meet Hanna in her small Ukrainian village in 1941. Anti-semitism is rising, with taunting and school yard cruelty. Soon this will be replaced with more lethal threats but, for now, the Russians have taken control and have "only" limited all religious observances. If the Germans gain control of Ukraine, everything will change. Most of the children are too young to understand or care about such things but Hanna, turning 14, understands enough to worry for herself, her family, friends, and all of the Jews who are threatened. She is human enough to worry for her good neighbors of all faiths.

Ultimately, the German war machine does push the Russian army out of the country and begin its program of "freeing" towns of Jews. First they are identified, then labeled with the infamous star, then rounded up, then shipped off or killed where they stand. This story may be old to some but forgotten or unknown by many. Here we see some variations on this theme of extermination but the cruelty is the same.

Hanna's story, based on that of a real family similarly threatened, takes a different, often terrifying path. Before the Slivka family can be taken, they plan and, with others, leave carefully to hide as long as necessary in the forest or wherever else they must go in order to live. This hiding will last for many, many months in the forest, followed by many more underground.

Masih has provided many cultural and religious insights within her story, fitting them seamlessly into the narrative of family events, adding to the value of the text as a young adult novel. There is also reference made to a readers guide in the afterword; this would be a helpful study guide. As I indicated above, I do believe that *My Name is Hanna* is a valuable book for our time. In a time where values and beliefs seem to be confused, it is helpful to read a beautiful book celebrating resilience and familial bonds and survival. This is a book adults can read with children. Both will benefit.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in return for an honest review.

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### **Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says**

?????

#### **5 beautiful and transfixing stars to *My Real Name is Hanna!***

Some of the most meaningful, poignant books I have read have been about the Holocaust, and *My Real Name is Hanna* will be placed on that same shelf.

"I will say my real name to you for the first time. Hanna Slivka. Don't be scared. I am still your mother. Born on February twenty-second, in the winter of 1928. Your grandmother often told me to remember this date because that is the day that God allowed me into this world to breathe my first soul breath of chilled Ukrainian air."

Hanna Slivka is a teen living in Soviet-occupied Ukraine when Hitler's army crosses the border. She and her family are Jewish, and the Gestapo wants the town, Kwasova, to be "free of Jews." The book begins, however, with a beautiful setting up of the scenery and daily life of this family living in a peaceful Ukraine. I was not familiar with the culture of Ukraine, especially during this time period, so I soaked in all of the stunningly descriptive prose.

Once the army arrives, Hanna's father is favored because he can fix things that no one else can, but eventually, their luck runs out, and they are forced to pack what they can and flee into the forest with other families. They later move to live in the caves for more security and less exposure. This is where they stayed for over a year's time, but not without some of the good helpers in the world contributing.

Based on true events, and with less than 5% of Ukrainian Jews surviving the Holocaust, this type of story begs to be told because there are so few around to tell it. Tara Lynn Masih's lyrical writing illustrates the strength and sheer will of Hanna and her family to survive. Overall, *My Real Name is Hanna* is a strong, emotionally-resonant story of friendship, family, and true compassion in the most dire of times.

Many thanks to the author for the finished copy to review. All opinions are my own.

My reviews can also be found on my blog: [www.jennifertarheelreader.com](http://www.jennifertarheelreader.com)



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## Rose (Traveling Sister) says

I read this with the Traveling Sisters, and we were all swept away by the tale of Hanna and her family. Thanks to NetGalley/Mandel Vilar Press for this ARC.

This was 4.5 because a few plot points could've used more attention, but it was just too beautiful to not round up. *My Real Name is Hanna* begins in 1941, when Hanna is just 13 years old. While Jews and Gentiles live in relative harmony in her family's shtetle, or village, the German SS looms near. Stalin, though oppressive in his own ways, allows Jews to live here if for no other reason than to defy the Nazis. As the war draws nearer to their back door, the laws, as well as the rations, get tighter.

Inevitably, the Germans invade. What follows are descriptions of the many horrors we all know occurred but are nevertheless gut-wrenching to read about: all Jews and those who help them are killed on sight. Women and children are not spared. Families are forced to flee into bunkers, forests, and caves. Even if the Nazis don't kill them, nature and starvation probably will.

*My Real Name is Hanna* is structured as a story Hanna tells to her daughter, so we know that she survives. Small reliefs such as this become critical to the narrative: a small bite of food, a ray of light, a meager doll to cherish. Hanna, her family, and a group of other Jews from her shtetle struggle to survive for several years, moving from one dangerous hideout to the next, growing weaker by the day.

**"The harvest moon floats like an enormous drop of amber honey in the inky sky, and I wonder what it is thinking of those tiny little specs running and chasing each other around on the planet below. I suspect the moon, if it could, would step on us like we step on annoying anthills in the schoolyard..."**

I enjoyed this book for so many reasons, including the unflappable hope that the exiled group retains throughout their three death-defying years together. Summoning the stories of their ancestors and religious beliefs, they are able to push through month after month of darkness, starvation, and fear.

What this book lacks in length, it makes up for with colorfully layered and descriptive prose. While Masih doesn't shy away from the harsh realities of the Holocaust, she does point out even the smallest points of beauty, which is likely how those in hiding had to think.

**"I visit the same places each day, and watch life change. New green on the ends of hemlocks that look like little gloved hands. Pinecones appearing like brown jewelry on branches. Hardwood leaves starting to lose their green, letting other colors trickle through their leaf veins till they are full of yellow, orange, red. Then they let go gradually, and fall to the forest floor. In my mind...I see images of men, women, and children falling into ravines."**

In addition to the descriptions of nature, there's also a major focus on food. For starters, the Jewish culture is rich with flavorful, hearty family meals. Secondly, Hanna and the families she hides with are unable to eat anything for long stretches of time, much less their traditional dishes. I'd suggest this for lovers of language who are looking for a quick but educational read.

This book inspired me to try out some yummy recipes for Rosh Hashanah. Check out my full review and my attempt to cook cholent on my blog post!

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## Carolyn says

At the end of this book, set in the region of Galicia in the western Ukraine, the author tells us that less than 2% of the Jews who lived there survived WW2. That is a truly heartbreaking statistic and makes this novel based on a true story of survival even more poignant.

In 1942 Hanna Slivka is nearly 14, living in a small Ukrainian village where Jews and Christians live side by side in peace and harmony, when the Germans arrive to start the process of making the area *judenfrei*. Initially her family is helped by friends and neighbours, but eventually most of the town people turn against them as the German propaganda machine swings into action and it becomes too dangerous to be seen helping Jews. Forced to flee deep into the forest with some other families to a small hut they eke out an existence until that too becomes too dangerous and they retreat to an underground cave system. Their days and nights are spent in darkness, food becomes even harder to find and survival becomes a question of whether they will succumb to starvation and malnutrition before the Russian army arrives to force out the Germans.

We know that Hanna survives, as she is the narrator telling her story to her daughter. The story is more about how this spirited, courageous child survived three years of living in fear and deprivation and what it is like to be hunted by merciless men. This is also a story of family bonds and courage, of passing down stories and religion to the next generation. Despite the darkness of the story, it never feels too oppressive as the author describes the beauty of the forest, the joy in finding food or receiving small acts of kindness from friends still prepared to help them. Hanna's one book on Joan of Arc helps to give her courage and the only paper on which to write and record their days in hiding. The children, lacking toys show their natural inventiveness and resilience by finding new games to play or playthings to make out of the nature to be found around them.

While there are many books written about the horrors of the Holocaust and those who survived, this is an inspirational, timely story at a time when there is still much hate and persecution in our world based on colour, ethnicity or religion. Recommended for both adults as well as young adults. 4.5★

*With thanks to Netgalley and the publisher Mandel Vilar Press for a digital copy of the book*

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## Angela M says

“Abram Slivka (my Papa)

Eva Slivka (my Mama)

Hanna Slivka (14 years old, loves to read)

Leeba Slivka (12 years old, loves to sew)

Symon Slivka (10 years old, a really good bit who

Loves his dog) Ovid (our dog)

Steed (our horse)

We all lived in this house until October 12, 1942. If you find this ,

say these names out loud, please, and bury this paper in the yard.”

Maybe a request for some semblance of a proper burial. Perhaps a plea for remembrance. These are the words that Hanna buries in a tin in the Slivka family's yard before they are forced to flee their home, their quiet, happy existence, as the Nazis move in to make the town free of Jews. This becomes a journey for survival from their life in the shtetle, this small town, their Polish and Jewish roots, in the Ukraine, to the deep of the forest and eventually to the darkness of a cave finding refuge from the darkest hearts of the Nazis. We don't see much of the horrific things that happened to the Jews as they are rounded up and sent to camps, but we know of course, and the characters find out as the novel moves forward. They learn that railway cars take away Jews and then the Nazis don't take them away anymore. They just shoot them as they try to escape through the forest. We do see first hand the hunger and hardship that the Slivka family, their extended family and neighbors endure. There was no food at times. They were starving until one of the men or older boys could safely leave to scrounge what they could.

This is a beautifully written, well researched story inspired by a real family who together survived the holocaust by hiding in a cave for well over a year. This is a story of courage, of love, of family, of culture, of religious beliefs, of how it is possible to sustain hope in the face of hunger and darkness and loss. Through the beloved character of Mrs. Petrovich, one of my favorites, the kind Christian neighbor, we are reminded of the goodness of people, so many of whom aided Jews through these horrifying times. Through the characters of the Cohan brothers, we are reminded of the courage of so many who risked their lives to save the people in their community. I was struck that this was about the importance of story telling, both real and wonderfully imagined on a number of levels. When the novel begins, it is Hanna telling her story of survival to her daughter. Hanna's beloved friend, Mrs. Petrovich, tells her stories through the beautiful eggs she decorates. The spirits of the children as well as the adults were sustained in the dark cave by the voices the children as they say "tell me a story". There are stories told in the cave remembering loved ones, some biblical, and some are fables of a sort - all beautifully told. Then of course there is this beautiful story told by Tara Lynn Masih encompassing all of this, itself based on a true one. While this may be geared to a YA audience, it is far from an ordinary coming of age story. I believe it's an extraordinary story that everyone should read because it's an imperative reminder that we can't forget that the Holocaust happened and we can't let it happen again.

I received an advanced copy of this book from Mandel Vilar Press through NetGalley.

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## **(Bern) Mom to 2 Posh Lil Divas says**

### **5 Stars for this poignant, beautifully written debut YA novel inspired by real Holocaust events**

One of the most touching aspects of this book for me was the strength, determination, loyalty and love each of the characters showed during such a bleak and desperate time. It isn't easy to sustain positivity during such a horrifying time. Yet, **family, friendship, hope, culture, devotion and religious beliefs paid a pivotal role in sustaining the Jewish people through the darkest of times when all else was lost.** In *My Real Name is Hanna*, Hanna Slivka is a young teen forced to leave her home and life as she knows it behind when the Germans cross the border into the Ukraine intent on making the land "Jew free". Along with members of her family and others from her village, she is forced into hiding in underground caves. There they live in the damp and cold darkness with meager amounts of food and little to no real comforts for over a year.

For a book focused on a time filled with such bleakness, cruelty and despair the story was beautiful, almost lyrical in its descriptions and emphasized compassion. It focused on the people that put their lives at risk to

help others. **The strong familial bonds and unyielding friendships depicted were a stark contrast to the prejudice, violence and hate of the time.**

**This is a powerful story that should be read and experienced by all.**

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### **Karen says**

This is the story of a young girl named Hanna Slivka, and her family who are Jewish and live first in Poland, then in the Ukraine during the years of the Holocaust.

A story of love, family, and survival.

This family had to go to extremes to try and stay safe... always on alert, having to leave their home..first to the forests...then to the caves, and sticking together to survive. There were a few kind people along the way that were a help to them.. but surviving was immensely difficult!

I did like that this showed the population left in the towns and how they coped... versus another concentration camp story.

Regardless, all the stories are so important and this one is based on the life of a real person.

Thank you to Netgalley and Mandal Vilar Press for the free digital ebook!

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### **Diane S ? says**

STRUGGLE AND SURVIVAL in the Ukraine. Due to shifting borders, Hanna and her family, have been considered, Poles, Austrisns and Ukrainians. Changing tides once again threaten as the Germans are heading their way. As a Jewish family they are close, and close to many of their non Jewish neighbors. It is time though for them to go into hiding, as their village is to become Jewish free, as news reaches them of what is happening to the Jews who are taken.

Meant for. YA audience, the violence is there but tampered down a bit, not all horrors written. Enjoyed the format of this, as a grown woman and mother, Hanna tells her story of the time, the years, her family and others had to hide. Based on an actual family and their experiences makes this even more poignant. The author did a wonderful job staying true to the thoughts and feelings of a fourteen years old girl. I loved the characters Alla, a non Jewish woman who comes to their aid in many ways, as do a few other at great risk to themselves. Of course more turned away or reported than tried to help. The closeness and love, faith shown by this family was beautiful admidst horrific times.

The authors note makes clear how well researched this book was, and explained more of the historic events in this region. It also tells what is fact, what it was based on, and what was fiction. All very well done. A good book for young adults to read as an important introduction to the Holocaust.

ARC from Netgalley.

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## Debra says

**\*\*This book was inspired by real Holocaust events**

"I have lost everything that can ever be lost. I have given everything that can ever be given." - my family's  
MA - Holocaust Survivor

Hanna Slivka is almost fourteen years old when her entire world is turned upside down. Hitler's army has crossed into the Soviet occupied Ukraine. They are intent on making the land "free of Jews." Hanna's life goes from exploring with her siblings and helping her neighbor decorate pysanky eggs, to having rocks thrown at her on her walk home from school, to hiding in the walls of her home when the army comes, to eventually leaving everything behind to seek safety in the forest and eventually in an underground cave with several other families.

The caves, although they provide protection, do not let in any sunlight, fresh air and keeps them in perpetual darkness both literally and figuratively. They do not know what is going on in the outside world, until their members must leave to find food and hopefully trade with nearby farmers.

This book is a well written account of what it was like to live/survive during the Holocaust. Where neighbors either helped neighbors or turned on them. Where hatred and racism tore away people's morals and values. A time when fear and hatred ruled the day. But in the darkness of the caves, humanity existed. People helped people, lives were lived, hope remained, and the true meaning of what makes a home is learned.

This is a timely book as there are so very few Holocaust survivors left in the world. My Ma passed away in 2017. Books such as this one keeps their stories and memories alive. No one truly knows what he/she is capable of until they are placed to the test. Readers may ask "could I survive this?" I hope none of us ever have to find out.

As I mentioned this book is well written and contains beautiful descriptions of nature. I enjoyed Hanna's relationship with her next-door neighbor and both of their openness and interest in each other's lives. This book showed the strength of family bonds but also showed the strength of friendship and how small acts of kindness can not only make someone's day but can also save a life. This is a wonderful book about courage, survival, and family for readers of all ages but is geared for the YA population.

A 2018 Skipping Stones Honor Award Book

Thank you to Mandel Vilar Press and NetGalley who provided me with a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review. All of the thoughts and opinions expressed in this review are my own.

Read more of my reviews at [www.openbookpost.com](http://www.openbookpost.com)

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