

My Real Name Is Hanna

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Narrated as a harrowing memory retold to an inquisitive granddaughter, Hanna's story begins in 1939. Hanna and her family live in a remote village in Soviet-occupied Ukraine. Anti-Semitism is a constant issue, but it does little to dampen Hanna's vivaciousness and connection to a Christian neighbor.

Hitler's army poses an increasing threat that drives Hanna, her family, and other Jewish villagers into hiding. At first, they simply rush for wall and floor hideaways whenever a threat arises; eventually, most flee into the forest. Hanna's family and others escape into a series of underground caves and spend the rest of the war eking out a living, combating hunger and malnutrition and trying to stay true to their faith.

A brief preface offers momentary respite from this harshness, revealing that Hanna survives the hard times to live a long and happy life; the war cannot snuff out her spirit. In recounting her tale, she speaks her true name for the first time, having adopted an alias to immigrate to America.

Narrated with a balanced blend of youthful innocence and maturity, Hanna's descriptions are often poetic and vivid. To strong effect, the loveliness of Hanna's thoughts counters the ever-present dangers of what she faces.

With deep empathy and intense sensitivity, the narration seamlessly slips into the voices of various family members and friends; they narrate stories to pass the time. Uncle Levi stands out among them; he is conflicted by faith, but determined to help others at great personal risk. Reminders to remember the Holocaust and to create atmospheres of tolerance are strongly imparted throughout.

Though the Nazi threat is always present, the narrative is more focused on the unique elements of Hanna's Ukrainian village, with its blended culture and traditions. Claustrophobic chapters set in the cave are well juxtaposed with earlier airy and hopeful settings. Balancing historical realities with beautiful prose, *My Real Name Is Hanna* is engaging.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September/October 2018)

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