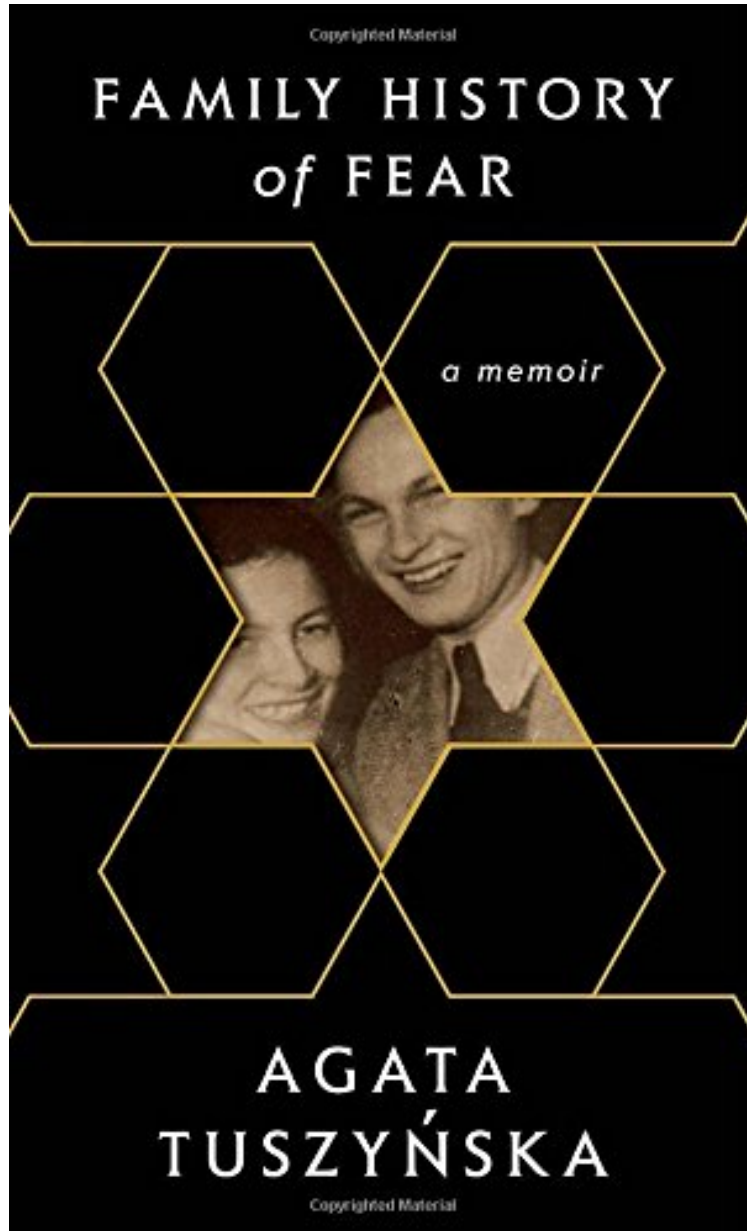


[Free] Family History of Fear: A Memoir

Family History of Fear: A Memoir

Agata Tuszynska

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#1158314 in Books Tuszynska Agata 2016-05-17 2016-05-17Format: Deckle EdgeOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.51 x 1.41 x 6.04l, 1.51 #File Name: 0375413707400 pagesFamily History of Fear A Memoir | File size: 20.Mb

Agata Tuszynska : Family History of Fear: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Family History of Fear: A Memoir:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Why do I love this book from the first minute of reading?By

Marzena Bera Yes, I love it. The memoir is like the book describing also my life... And though the topic is tough, this isn't despair-filled story. Perhaps because reading about WW II and Holocaust we, the readers, know from the beginning - oppressed certainly survived, because it their offspring describes the past, the present and gives the hope for brighter (?) future. At least each one of us may dream - the future MIGHT be better... I think that especially professionals, dealing with souls and bodies of traumatized First Generation of survivors, unavoidably suffering from the past horrors and demons, as well as those helping so-called second and third generations of survivors, children - now in their sixties seventies, and also, unfortunately - grandkids, sometimes great-grandchildren of survivors, who raised them among secrets, serious children growing up in silent homes, without aunts, uncles, cousins, too often not knowing about family roots, one day - when the truth is revealed at last - each one of us got the shock of the life; they/WE all went through this to some various degree and got damaged. So, this book looks like a must-read by professionals struggling with OUR demons, sometimes helpless and harming us instead of helping. This book tells it all what each such patient has to say... I recommend the book with all of my heart's beats!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By Lawrence B. Gratt
An interesting story of survival...6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Family Secrets Revealed
By John D. Cofield
In the twentieth century few countries had as tumultuous a history as Poland's. Beginning the century divided between Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, Poland regained its independence after World War I, only to be conquered and redivided once more by Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. Looted and purged of its Jewish population (the largest in Europe before World War II) by the Nazis, then forced into Communism by the Soviets after 1945, Poland spent nearly 45 years behind the Iron Curtain before regaining full independence in 1989. The long journey of the Polish people through the twentieth century is well depicted in this memoir by the writer and historian Agata Tuszynska. Tuszynska grew up in a relatively privileged home during the 1950s and 1960s. Her father was a well known radio broadcaster, thus providing her and her family a higher status than the norm, even though her parents' marriage actually ended when she was a child. When Tuszynska was 19 her mother told her a secret: she was Jewish. The Holocaust had destroyed most of Poland's Jewish population, and most of the survivors had immigrated after the war, but a small minority had remained, assimilated and, in the younger generations, mostly unaware of its heritage. This book is a recounting of Tuszynska's search for and recovery of memories of both sides of her family. I found Family History of Fear fascinating. The interconnections between what had been a wealthy Jewish family with its less prosperous Polish Catholic in-laws were enlightening to study. From my perspective as an American who was born and raised at roughly the same time as Tuszynska, it was intriguing to learn how young Poles were brought up (at least on the surface) to believe that Communism was leading their country to a great and prosperous future. And there can never be too many memoirs recording the horrors of the Holocaust, especially now that so many survivors' voices have been stilled forever. Family History of Fear was written in Polish, then translated to French and thence into English. This may account for some parts of Tuszynska's stories of her forebears being rather dry reading. Nevertheless this is an important memoir of survival and resilience in the face of massive change. A similar tale can be found in Rita Gabis' A Guest At The Shooters' Banquet.

Family History of Fear has been in me for years. Along with this secret. From the instant I found out I was not who I thought I was. Every family has its own history. Many families carry a tragic past. Like the authors mother, many Poles did not tell their children a complete story of their wartime exploits of the underground Home Army, the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising, the civil war against the Communists. Years had to pass before the stories of suffering and heroism could be told. In Family History of Fear, Agata Tuszyska, one of Polands most admired poets and cultural historians, writes of the stories she heard from her mother about her secret past. Tuszyska, author of Vera Gran (a book of extraordinary depth and power Richard Eder, The Boston Globe; captivating Newsweek; darkly absorbing, shrewd, and sharply etched Publishers Weekly), has written a powerful memoir about growing up after the Second World War in Communist Poland blonde, blue-eyed, and Catholic. The author was nineteen years old and living in Warsaw when her mother told her the truth that she was Jewish and began to tell her stories of the familys secret past in Poland. Tuszyska, who grew up in a country beset by anti-Semitism, rarely hearing the word Jew (only from her Polish Catholic father, and then, always in derision), was unhinged, ashamed, and humiliated. The author writes of how she skillfully erased the truth within herself, refusing to admit the existence of her other half. In this profoundly moving and resonant book, Tuszyska investigates her past and writes of her journey to uncover her familys history during World War II of her mother at age eight and her mother, entering the Warsaw Ghetto for two years as conditions grew more desperate, and finally escaping just before the uprising, and then living hidden on the other side. She writes of her grandfather, one of five thousand Polish soldiers taken prisoner in 1939, becoming, later, the countrys most famous radio sports announcer; and of her relatives and their mysterious pasts, as she tries to make sense of the hatred of Jews in her country. She writes of her discoveries and of her willingness to accept a radically different definition of self, reading the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer, opening up for her a world of Polish Jewry as he became her guide, and then writing about his life and work, circling her Jewish self in Lost Landscapes: In Search of Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Jews of Poland. A beautiful and affecting book of discovery and acceptance; a

searing, insightful portrait of Polish Jewish life, lived before and after Hitlers Third Reich.

Praise for Agata Tuszyskas FAMILY HISTORY OF FEAR The 20th centurys darkest moments have inspired more than a few illuminating memoirs, and Agata Tuszyskas Family History of Fear belongs in their number. Joshua Rubenstein, The Wall Street Journal Tuszyska reveals a history that is raw, painful, and personal . . . Beautiful and terrifying . . . A work of fierce courage. Dalia Wolfson, Jewish Book Council A telling historical anecdote, practically overflowing with meaning . . . As much a personal history as it is a piece of psychic archeology. Tuszyska digs into her familys past, sifting through records and stories, and retracing the steps of her ancestors . . . Not only a memoir or work of restorative personal history. Its an act of un-erasure. Tracing her bloodlines of fear, secrecy and self-loathing, she uncovers a history of survival and solidarity, of profound love. John Semley, The Globe and Mail About the Author AGATA TUSZYSKA is the author of six collections of internationally translated poetry, a biography of Isaac Bashevis Singer, Vera Gran: The Accused, and Bruno Schulzs Fiance. Tuszyska is the recipient of the Polish PEN Club Ksawery Pruszycki Prize and a grant from the Fulbright Foundation. She lives in Toronto, Warsaw, and Paris. www.agatatuszynska.com CHARLES RUAS was born in China and graduated from Princeton University and the Sorbonne. He is a specialist in French and English comparative literature. He is the author of Conversations with American Writers, and has translated Michel Foucaults Death and the Labyrinth: Raymond Roussel as well as Pierre Assoulines An Artful Life: A Biography of D. H. Kahnweiler 1884-1979 and Herg: The Man Who Created Tintin. He was awarded by the French government the Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters. Ruas lives in New York City. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. | The secret This book has been in me for years. Along with this secret. From the instant I found out I was not who I thought I was. From the moment my mother told me she was Jewish. I was born in Poland, in Warsaw, several years after the war. I had blue eyes and blond hair, a source of great pride to my mother, whose own eyes and hair were dark. Today, I realize she wanted a Polish child, for fear of the fate her daughter might inherit otherwise, a fate like her own. And even though the war was officially part of the past in a new socialist Poland, where everyone was equal by definition, she resolved to obscure her origins. We are our memory. We are what we remember. And what others remember about us. Even more than that, I often find myself thinking, we are our lapses of memory. We are what we forget, what in self-defense we blot out of our memory, chase from our consciousness, avoid in our thinking. We conceal memories to make life easier or lighter, so it will not hurt. I do not remember when my mother told me she was Jewish. I remember nothing about it not the day, nor the season, nor the place; not whether we were sitting at the table or by the window; not the tone of her voice, nor the color of her words. I have no memory of any such conversation. Maybe she told me that she hid in a cellar during the war. That was not unusual many Poles were forced to hide in cellars or attics. Maybe she said she had to run away from the Germans, escape, like many others Poles who were hunted down by the Nazis, rounded up at work, machine-gunned in the streets and forests, sent to the camps. She does not remember exactly how she went about it, but she certainly did not begin with the persecutions and the walls, the marks, the distinguishing insignia of the yellow star. She began by telling me stories. About the curtain, at first. Then, about the chinchilla coat and the muff. Then about the coach in front of the ghetto wall. Nothing more direct. Little by little. To make it easier. She wanted her child to be without a stigma. She was happy to have brought a little blue-eyed blonde into the world. This little girl had a proper Polish father. She taught me how to live in this country. She didnt want to weigh me down with a burden heavier than I could bear. She didnt want her child to have to grow up with a feeling of injustice and fear. In her estimation, one could always broach the subject when a child was capable of handling it and taking care of herself. She is sure she told me when I was nineteen. I have no reason not to believe her. Every family has a story. Many Polish families have tragic ones. In those days, people did not always tell children about their hardships during the war the Resistance, the Home Army, participation in the uprisings in Warsaw and fighting in the forests. It took them years to start talking about what they had been through, about the pain as much as the heroism. These stories, when they finally came out, drew the generations together and gave them strength. But my mothers experience was not like that. It was more, much more. Not only in the depth of the suffering and tragedy but also in their consequences. There was nothing in it to brag about or cling to, nothing to wear out by retelling. There were no heroic deaths, no patriotic examples, no sacred traditions, no hope for the future. It had to be concealed. This thing. Years passed before I found the strength to admit it. Before my spirit abandoned its defenses and took it in. I needed time. Without accepting it, to be sure, but still inwardly weighing the possibility. It took about ten years. Has it happened? Can I say I am Jewish? No. Did my mother tell me her war stories? Did she actually tell me, or did she only want to tell them without quite having the strength to go through with it? No, its not enmity that you absorb with your mothers milk. Its fear. On the subject of the fur coat. It had to be taken out and aired. Especially a coat as respectable as one of chinchilla. Especially one that has been kept in a wardrobe on the Aryan side for years. When Mama and her mother slipped out of the ghetto and reached the safety of their first hideout, they often went for walks after dark. They were afraid of being caught, but they were also hungry for some fresh air and the chance to get their blood moving. My grandmother also wanted her coat to get a good airing. A coat that was already beginning to fall apart, by the way. Fur wears out faster than a human being does. In the end, with a heavy heart, my grandmother had it cut up into small pieces. In a snapshot taken in Zakopane after the war,

Mother was carrying a chinchilla muff; the coat didn't make it much farther than that. Concerning the curtain. In fact, this story is all about salt. My mother and grandmother were hiding in a small apartment at 18 Krasiski Street in the Fourth Colony, where they used to live before the war. The place belonged to two sisters who worked in the neighborhood as domestics. In the kitchen's pantry, a curtain with dark blue flowers on it. One night, the boyfriend of one of the sisters, Helenka, came over. She made barley soup for him, but she didn't salt it enough. He complained. She went to borrow some salt from a neighbor. Left alone, he decided to find some himself. In the pantry, behind the curtain. Mama was twelve years old and held her breath. Her mother held the curtain closed. He understood. They had to move out. If only the soup had been salty enough, they might have been able to stay together a little while longer behind that curtain. Until the moment when a knife or a dish was needed, because that's where they were kept too. If the boyfriend had wanted to, he could have turned them in to the Gestapo then and there. If ... When my mother came out of the ghetto, it was summer. A chilly August day. The young girl, small in size, with shiny black braids, was wearing several pairs of striped stockings and two dresses, one on top of the other, and a dark blue coat with a collar, and a scarf tied under her chin. She walked beside her mother, who kept a tight grip on her little hand. They had to go right through the courthouses on Leszno Street. She knew she had to walk with a sure step, with no hesitation. Constantly surrounded; it was better in a crowd, where others, many others—Jews and non-Jews, ordinary people went about their business. The two of them climbed stairs, went down hallways, and then took more stairs, this time going down. So simple. And yet so hard to do. The girl didn't see her mother take off her armband. Nobody was paying attention to them anyway. She does not recall the faces of the people who suddenly appeared in front of them like another wall. Several men and a woman wearing a scarf, with strands of hair sticking out. Mama and her mother were afraid of Germans. But these were not Germans. All right, you little kike, hand it over, all of it, cmon, they heard. Or we'll turn you in to the Gestapo. They huddled together as if they were thieves. My mother's mother tried to defend herself, protesting, explaining, and finally begging. To no avail. That was when the coach pulled up. The driver, one of those Poles with a great thick mustache, took their side. Leave the woman alone! he cried. What's the matter with you? Can't you see the little girl is scared to death? And to them, he said, Get in! They piled into the coach. Her mother gave him an address in a voice filled with relief, and they drove away. The little girl held on to her mother's coat, watching the buildings go by. They did not recognize that part of town. They had never been there before. It was starting to get dark. Shop windows sparkled all around them. They passed streetcars and black German limousines. A group came out of a corner restaurant, laughing. The hats that the women were wearing looked brand new. A little farther, in a large square by a church, some boys were playing ball. The city was keeping itself busy. The world did not end at Umschlagplatz after all, they thought. The coach turned into Szucha Avenue and pulled up in front of Gestapo headquarters. The driver turned around. What did you think, ydwo, dirty, fucking Jew?? That I wouldn't take you back where you belong? Laughing, he pushed them toward the entrance. Polish policemen were prepared for fugitives from the ghetto. They locked them up in a room and demanded money. On the other side of the door, they could hear the sound of German boots and voices. In the ghetto, that meant death. The little girl watched her mother take off her ring and her wedding band, and then her watch. After a moment, without a word, she started to unbutton her coat. Then she reached down toward her garter belt and extricated, one by one, twenty-dollar gold coins that had been stitched into the cloth. She placed them on the wooden table. Six in all. It's not enough, a man said. Not enough. It was all they had. She asked if she could make a phone call. They deliberated for a while, mentioning sums that made the little girl's head spin. Her mother, in an expressionless voice, repeated each amount into the receiver. Who was she talking to? Who was willing to pay that kind of money for us? Her aunt's husband was the only name she could come up with, the one who had arranged their escape from the ghetto. They settled on a time and place. The money would be delivered to that address. They were on the Aryan side. That story stuck to me, against my will. It keeps coming back, in various versions, in my dreams. I can't get rid of it. In this dream, I am the little girl with the striped stockings and the scarf tied under her chin. It is definitely my scarf; it's the color of the ocean, and so is the little bucket filled with sand that I'm holding. I am not kicking pebbles as I go, like the other dark-eyed Jewish children, and in this dream I ask myself why not. I have the same eyes as they do, dark and full of fear. Better look down. I am walking beside my mother. I am not sure whether it's my own mother or the grandmother I never knew. She holds herself very straight, unnaturally stiff, and squeezes my hand. A cold sun shines. We walk along at a steady pace even though I want to run. Run and yell, as if, after wandering for hours in a gloomy forest, I had suddenly discovered a sunlit clearing. The air feels different on the other side. Feels alive. I do not recall the faces of the other people who suddenly appear in front of them like another wall. My mind is on the little girl, because nobody else is looking after her, she is only twelve and the Germans frighten her. But these are not Germans. All right, you little kike, hand it over, all of it, cmon. They get it; we get it. And then the metallic sound of the word Gestapo... sta, PO. I would not have known the word Gestapo at that age. There were no books about the war yet. I learned it much later, even though I was still carrying sand in my bucket. Mother, or maybe Grandmother, hid her face in her hands, like a child, repeating, Leave us alone, leave us alone. I cannot move. I just stand there, staring at them, and little by little I recognize the face of this one and that one: neighbors, acquaintances, friends. I look them straight in the eye. Then the coach arrives. The driver has a mustache, a huge Polish mustache like the one worn by my Jewish great-grandfather, Henryk, from Przedrynek adjacent to czycas

main marketplace. He could even wiggle the ends when he held his granddaughter, my mother, on his lap and sang her the song about the cobblers wife and her paper slippers. Leave the woman alone! he cries. Whats the matter with you? Cant you see the little girl is scared to death? With a shrug, he invites us to climb into his coach. The horse smiles. But this is not Grandfather Przedborski; this is his Polish brother. Not for nothing have so many generations lived together under the same roof. In the name of this house, shared for centuries on Polish soil, he cannot allow anybody to insult us. He takes us under his protective wing, and the enchanted carriage rolls along, clattering on the cobblestones and carrying us, carrying us, carrying. Grandmother is on the verge of saying, in a strangled voice, clumsy words of gratitude, full of shame and thankfulness, and more. She is about to speak when we turn abruptly. The sand is spilling out of my bucket. What is a bucket doing here? I wonder. An hourglass with sand in it, perhaps, time passing. The last moments. We are approaching Szucha Avenue. What did you think, ydwo, dirty, fucking Jew?? That I wouldnt take you back where you belong? What do I do with this dream? I thought. With this story? Life has a cost; you have to do whats right, pay the price. The wedding band and the engagement ring were not enough. The Omega watch, the gold coins sewn into the garter belt, not enough. So they gave the mother and daughter one last chance. A rich relative. You dont come across that every day. Welcome to the Aryan side. I am still holding the little girls hand when I wake up. I am protecting her from her Polish brothers. But then I ask myself how I would treat her. I ask myself if I wouldnt be afraid to play with her in the backyard, if I would have shared my slice of sugared bread with her. If I would have had the strength, like others did, to hide her in my closet or in my attic. Even when the money ran out and there was no more hope.