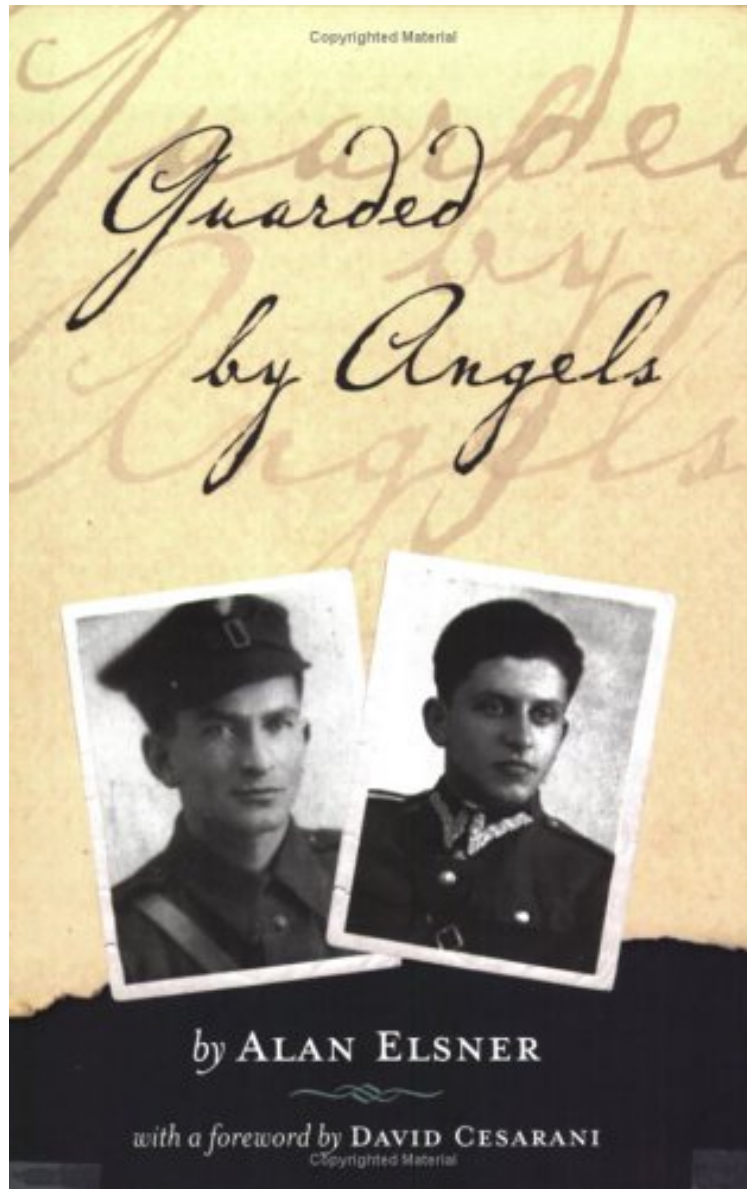


[PDF] Guarded By Angels: How My Father And Uncle Survived Hitler And Cheated Stalin

Guarded By Angels: How My Father And Uncle Survived Hitler And Cheated Stalin

Alan Elsner

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Study in How Courage Can Trump EvilBy Glenn Fairman" In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles." -David Ben-Gurion Alan Elsner's book "Guarded By Angels," a gripping and relentless story of his father and uncles during WWII, has that rare and subtle blend of the real and the miraculous--a tale of inhuman hardship and courage that has the combined effect of searing into our consciousness the reality of evil and awakening us to the truth that such evil can be overcome. In a little over 250 pages, Elsner draws us back to his father's Poland and recounts the odyssey of Gene, Mark, and Henek as they are caught between the bloody pincers of Hitler and Stalin. Along the way they are obliged to conceal their Jewish identities and miraculously manage to survive being fed into: the Destructive Labor Camps of the Gulag, the Nazi surge through the Land of the Cossacks, and the rabid anti-Semitism of Poles who were fatally trapped between both brutal regimes. Every chapter is brimming with suspense as the young men live by their wits and never give in to the hopelessness and barbaric cruelty that claimed many who shared their fate. That both Gene and Mark rise to the level of Polish artillery officers in the dog days of Nazi Germany is not surprising, given that they have survived the Arctic Prison Camps designed to dredge the last strength from men before they expired. In fact, anyone familiar with Solzhenitsyn's Book Three of the Gulag Archipelago will find this book transmitting the same vein of impossible optimism in spite of the backdrop of a monolithic grayness and despair. It is finally at the tale's end that we come to grips with the human aftermath of what the horror of war has wrought for the Jews of Poland and their near extermination. Many decades later, Eugene and son Alan retrace the men's journey in an attempt to close the circle and restore memories. It is the trip to Belzec, the primitive genocidal monument to Nazi malevolence, which caps the remarkable story and gives both father and son the impetus to bond in a way that few will ever do. Some stories have the effect of attaching themselves to us and assuming a niche in our beings. Elsner has accomplished the rare feat of melding a taut action biography and offering us a character study of humanity caught within the crucible of war. That these brave men survived to tell the story of lives who did not is consistent with the spirit of Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum whose Martyr's and Heroes' Remembrance Authority has given sanction to and published this heartbreaking yet life affirming book. I place it among the many noble tomes in my library which occupy a hallowed place in my soul.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Timeless Lesson of Life, Family, Human Spirit and the Closeness of EvilBy David R. Webber Behind the mere mechanics of the story is the realization that this happened just 60 years ago. The line between life today in Europe and N. America and the Europe of 1939 is all too thin. Technology has changed our lives but people still live these life experiences of the Elsner family in Africa, Asia, and S. America today. Everyone needs to read this book and take inspiration from it, especially the younger generations who cannot quite believe that this could be "real". Life is not just merely about what you own, it is about what you do and how you respect others. It is about how society allows those with power to treat people also. It is the unheard voices that still cry out uncounted today. Alan has labored hard over this book, the Elsner family is sharing a true gift in this recounting of all the details of this darkest time for their family and it deserves to have the widest possible audience. The story may not be market or Hollywood "fashionable" but the message is timeless and essential. This book is deeply moving and inspirational - I hope that your purchase this book and tell other people about it.

DW0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Great Story of Courage and PersistenceBy EWR An intimate view of the Soviet prison system and the plight of Jewish refugees in the USSR during WWII. The closeness of these two brothers and their incredible good fortune in overcoming every obstacle makes it seem they really were "guarded by angels." The story is so well told, it's as though Mr. Elsner experienced this himself.

This is the dramatic story of two young Jews, Gene and Mrk Elsner, who were forced to flee their home in southern Poland in 1939, only to be arrested by Soviet authorities in Lwow the following year and transported to labor camps north of the Arctic Circle. Near death from starvation, they were released after 18 months and traveled thousands of miles across the Soviet Union, passing through Central Asia, before finding refuge in a Cossack village in the Caucasus. They survived six months of Nazi occupation and were later drafted by a Polish brigade attached to the Red Army and participated in the Soviet advance through Poland and into Germany, where Gene was seriously wounded and counted for dead.