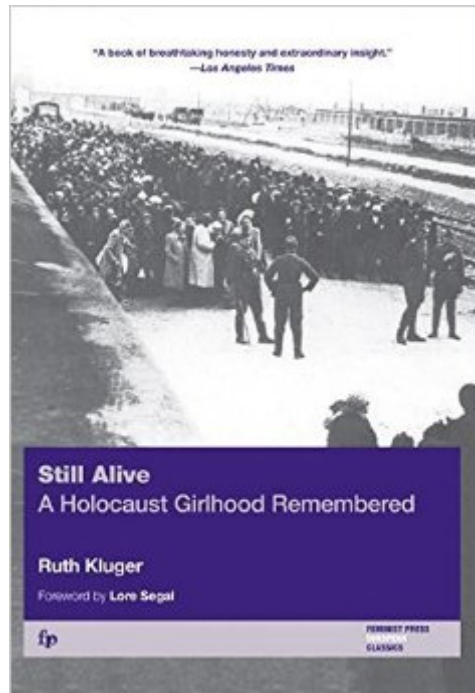


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Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered (The Helen Rose Scheuer Jewish Women's Series)



Synopsis

Swept up as a child in the events of Nazi-era Europe, Ruth Kluger saw her family's comfortable Vienna existence systematically undermined and destroyed. By age eleven, she had been deported, along with her mother, to Theresienstadt, the first in a series of concentration camps which would become the setting for her precarious childhood. Kluger's story of her years in the camps and her struggle to establish a life after the war as a refugee survivor in New York, has emerged as one of the most powerful accounts of the Holocaust. Interwoven with blunt, unsparing observations of childhood and nuanced reflections of an adult who has spent a lifetime thinking about the Holocaust, *Still Alive* rejects all easy assumptions about history, both political and personal. Whether describing the abuse she met at her own mother's hand, the life-saving generosity of a woman SS aide in Auschwitz, the foibles and prejudices of Allied liberators, or the cold shoulder offered by her relatives when she and her mother arrived as refugees in New York, Kluger sees and names an unexpected reality which has little to do with conventional wisdom or morality tales. *Still Alive* is a memoir of the pursuit of selfhood against all odds, a fiercely bittersweet coming-of-age story in which the protagonist must learn never to rely on comforting assumptions, but always to seek her own truth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While Ruth Kluger's life trajectory shares certain features with other survivor stories, the way in

which she narrates it-with deep intelligence, unblinking honesty and searing incisiveness, as well as the poet's facility for metaphor-puts STILL ALIVE apart. Her account avoids sentimentality and cliché; it eschews escapism and sanitizing as it unabashedly mines the depths of experience in extremis and brings to the surface a myriad of difficult truths. Attempting to please no one, Kluger's courageous voice demands uncommon rigor of her reader as she debunks a number of myths-of roots, for example, ("...running away was the best thing I ever did...."); the myth of the moral superiority of survivors and the hope that some good must have come from the camps, ("Auschwitz was no instructional institution....You learned nothing there, and least of all humanity and tolerance"); the patriarchal myth and "old prejudice" that men will protect their women (whereas in reality the weakest were most exposed and often died abandoned and in misery). She dares heartbreaking speculations about her father's death and suggests that a "pornography of death" functioned in the camps. Kluger is equally at home with the adult's capacity to analyze and the child's unerring eye for injustices, betrayals and humiliations as well as the inextinguishable nature of human desire. The story of her paranoid mother, who refused to release her to the safety of a Kindertransport, who as often as not gave unreliable guidance that nevertheless saved their lives at a crucial moment-the examination of this lifelong relationship becomes an exquisite and excruciating portrait of human connectedness in all its perplexities.

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