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The Safest Lie



Synopsis

This powerful historical novel tells the story of a young girl who is smuggled out of the Warsaw ghetto and struggles to both hide and hold onto her Jewish identity. In 1940, nine-year-old Anna Bauman and her parents are among 300,000 Polish Jews struggling to survive the wretched conditions in the Warsaw ghetto. Anna draws the attention of Jolanta (the code name for the real-life Resistance spy Irena Sendler, who smuggled hundreds of children out of the ghetto). Jolanta wants to help Anna escape. Anna's mother drills her day and night, teaching her a new identity, that of Roman Catholic Anna Karwolska. Soon, Anna is whisked out of Warsaw to a Catholic orphanage and then to a foster family. Anna's story is a suspenseful and deeply moving account of the sacrifices endured, the dangers faced, and the heroism demonstrated by courageous young victims, their parents and their saviors. It sheds light on yet another tragedy of the Holocaust: rescued children who lost not only their loved ones, but their very identities and Jewish heritage.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (15 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

Ever since I was 10 years old and I read the Diary of Anne Frank, I've not been able to stay away from Holocaust stories. I always prefer a survival story but I also realize that for every one of these, countless others have died. I learned about Angela's book many years ago when she won

an SCBWI grant to conduct research in Poland on Irena Sendler. Her story is woven into the fictional story of a young Jewish girl, Anna Bauman, who is smuggled out of the ghetto with a fake identity. She learns to behave like a good little Catholic girl, never forgetting that she is Jewish. THE SAFEST LIE is a fast-paced book (just look at that suspenseful cover), covering four years of Anna's life, from the time Jolanta (alias of Irena Sendler) meets with Anna's parents to the various safe houses and convent that Anna goes to, until she settles with a foster family who love her unreservedly. But danger lurks everywhere and it is a miracle her true identity is not discovered. The ending is heart-rending. Once the war is over, the children are returned to their families. Most do not survive the ghetto because they've been taken to death camps. For the children who were babies when they were smuggled out, all they know is the Catholic faith, so it is a shock to learn they are Jewish. Angela Cerrito is a powerful writer who bears witness to the trials of these children and the many people who took great risks to save them. Thank you so much for writing this book, Angela. This is the second book I've read that addresses the retention of religious identity during an adoption (the first was Rory's Promise). In the case of these Jewish children, it was impossible to place the children with Jewish families since they were all in the ghetto. So they had to learn how to behave like Catholics.

This was a quick-paced novel that addressed the many issues that children faced during this time in history. It showed the love and the resignation that parents confronted as they realized that they no longer had control of their family's circumstances as the war advanced on them. These parents knew that their best option was to have their children placed in another homes, away from them, as their chances of survival were greater if they were not seen as being in a Jewish community. What a sacrifice it would be, to relinquish your own children to someone else and never know if you would see them again, the love it would take to let them go. I felt a multitude of emotions as I read this novel, the urgency as Anna is told her new identity, the intensity as she rehearsed it over and over again and then the anxiety as she is rushed through the streets to her drop off. Her parents are excited for her yet there is fear, sadness creeps around the edges and the unknown clouds the air as they send her off on this new path of her life. So much is riding on this for her and yet, she is not sure of what lies before her or if she is even ready for it. She realizes it's much better outside the ghetto with the many luxuries that are just there for the taking, but the individuals that she wants to share them with are not there and this saddens her. She's finding it difficult to keep her old self hidden behind her new identity and she knows that a slip of the tongue and it could all be over. She finds herself in a Catholic orphanage and they have enough to get by. She'll never forget who

she was and the values her parents taught her. Some of the children are placed in other homes and the war rages on.

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