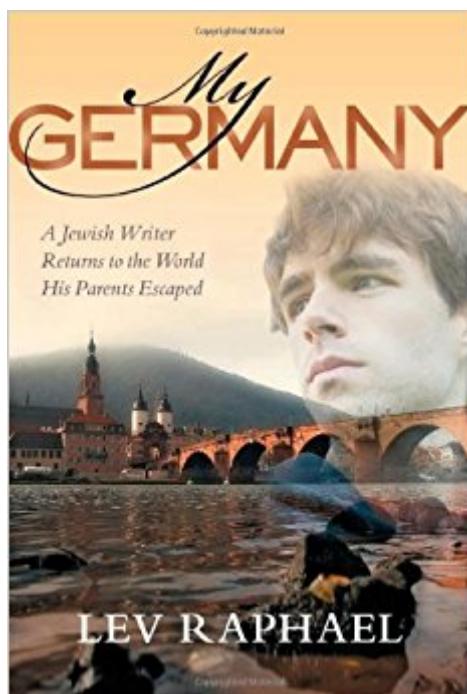


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My Germany: A Jewish Writer Returns To The World His Parents Escaped



Synopsis

Lev Raphael grew up loathing everything German. A son of Holocaust survivors, haunted by his parents' suffering and traumatic losses under Nazi rule, he was certain that Germany was one place in the world he would never visit. Those feelings shaped his Jewish and gay identity, his life, and his career. Then the barriers of a lifetime began to come down, as revealed in this moving memoir. After his mother's death, while researching her war years, Raphael found a distant relative living in the very city where she had been a slave laborer. What would he learn if he actually traveled to the place where his mother had found freedom and met his father? Not long after that epochal trip, a German publisher bought several of his books for translation. Raphael was launched on book tours in Germany, discovering not so much a new Germany, but a new self: someone unafraid to face the past and transcend it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Germany was, Raphael says, "a country I had sworn never to visit . . . anywhere I turned in that country, I might face something that had belonged to a murdered relative." But a book tour for his Holocaust-survivor novel *The German Money* (2003) took him there. Haunted by his mother's experiences in a slave labor camp, he wondered whether forgiveness is possible. In this book, that leads to flashbacks personalizing the horrors of the Holocaust. A photo of relatives in pre-war Vilna, "as much at ease as a Jew could be in Poland," prompted musings about the Poles' anti-Semitism, which eventuates in recollections of his mother's desperate retreat in 1941 from the Polish-Soviet border to Vilna, where Germans were rounding

up Jewish men for mass execution. Encompassing recollections of childhood with parents grimly silent on the defining experience of their lives as well as accounts of historic atrocities, Raphael's chronicle of growth and self-discovery isn't easy reading, but his hard-earned healing and freedom from a tortured past make it remarkably satisfying. --Whitney Scott

It is impossible to read Raphael's story without feeling a sense of awe at what he was able to accomplish. --Nicki Leone Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance --Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance "Once again, Lev Raphael has broken ground with new literary matter. His memoir reads like a mystery novel." --Studies in American Jewish Literature "Part travelogue and part detective story, *My Germany* is a wholly enthralling, beautifully written story of healing and forgiveness." • Lynne Olson, author of *Troublesome Young Men* "Lev Raphael writes with the precision of a neurosurgeon, the warmth of an ancient storyteller, and the soul of a people that has known the extremes of joy and sorrow, hope and despair, love and hate more than almost any other." • The Jewish Bulletin, San Francisco "Stunning and powerful. . . . Lev Raphael's memoir is a superb work combining intellectual rigor with emotional honesty in exploring his three-fold identity as a son of Holocaust survivors, a Jew, and a gay man." • Alan L. Berger, Raddock Family Eminent Scholar Chair of Holocaust Studies, Florida Atlantic University

This book has been on my kindle for two years, and I finally had time to read it. What a thought provoking read. It held that I met the author at a writers conference two years ago and learned about this book. Anyone who is interested in learning about the Holocaust from the Second Generations point of view would be interested in this read.

I've read everything Lev Raphael has written over the years. I am Jewish, but my family has been in the US for three, four, and five generations, on both sides. Other than hearing from my mother, a teenager in Chicago during the late 30's/early 40's, about her family's attempts to help relatives flee Germany and Czechoslovakia, we were largely untouched by Hitler's Holocaust. However, I am a voracious reader of Holocaust literature, both fiction and non-fiction. Raphael grew up with two survivors as parents. Nearly everything in daily life was touched on by his parents' experiences. And, as with most survivors' families, they firmly boycotted anything produced in Germany. Lev did not meet a German til he was in college. He had no interest in ever visiting Germany, and in fact

didn't do so til he was invited to give a speech there about ten years ago. But wanting to investigate his mother's experience as a slave laborer during the war, he hesitantly visited Germany a few times, and eventually found his mother's story. He also found friends in Germany among the "new generation" of Germans, born largely after the war and brought up with full knowledge, and acknowledgment, of their parents' and grandparents' misdeeds. He began to feel at ease during his trips to Germany, often doing speaking engagements when his books were published in German. Raphael writes a great story of how his old taboos were recognised, acknowledged, and then discarded. I don't think he would have been able to "discard", without an exhaustive "recognition" and "acknowledgment" of both his feelings and the facts of post-war Germany.

Lev Raphael's latest book, *My Germany*, is a multifaceted tour de force that is at once shocking, compelling, informative and deeply moving. Raphael recounts his parents' horrific experiences as victims of the Holocaust. He delves into their unspeakable suffering as well as their triumphant survival. But Raphael goes beyond the atrocities of WWII. He explores the monumental impact of his parents' survivorship not only upon the victims themselves, but also upon their children. He paints a poignant, very personal portrait of what it is like to grow up in a house where ghosts of the past lurk in every corner. As he moves on in life, shadows of his parents' tragedies follow. In time, Raphael comes to cherish his Jewish heritage. He also finds love and embraces his gay identity. But it is not until he embarks upon a book tour throughout Germany that he truly faces, and conquers, his parents' demons. Once in a great while, a book comes along that imparts knowledge not only about the world around us, but also about the world within us. This is one such book. It is a rare treasure and a must-read for everyone.

In this moving and elegantly written memoir, Lev Raphael confronts the demons he inherited as being the son of Holocaust survivors. Fearful, skeptical, angry, and plain curious, he travels to Germany on book tours. He discovers that modern Germany is not his parents' Nazi Germany, the country mainly responsible for the horrors perpetrated on the Jewish people. This is a balanced account. The author presents as much detail as he can regarding the agonies his parents and the European Jews suffered, particularly in Germany and because of Germany. As an academic, he has done extensive research in Holocaust Studies. As a Second Generation Survivor, he has attempted to document the lives of his parents as fully as possible. He articulately presents all the reasons why the Germans should never be forgiven for their unspeakable crimes. Nevertheless, Lev Raphael unexpectedly discovered that he is at peace with Germany today. He half jokes that he is

even able to buy a German coffee grinder without guilt. As a member of the second-generation myself, I fully identify with his struggles. His account is highly readable, in spite of what would seem to be heavy subject matter. This book should be in every German and every Jewish home.

I savored this book until the very last page and even then, was sorry to put it down. This is a marvelous memoir, weaving a tapestry of multigenerational tragedy and survival, with acute and fascinating observations about the impact of history on the author's parent's lives, as well as his own. Much of their truth had been hidden from him as a child. Raphael has written a memoir that reads much like a contemporary mystery. You never know where the story will lead as he uncovers layer upon layer of his mother's past, culminating with the brutal reality of her experience at the hands of the Nazis. Raphael chronicles his own journey as a Second Generation Jewish writer coming to terms with his Jewishness, his sexual identity, and with Germany --the Germany of his parent's experience as well as his own. I couldn't recommend this memoir more highly.

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