



Under a Red Sky: Memoir of a Childhood in Communist Romania

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Eva Zimmermann is eight years old, and she has just discovered she is Jewish. Such is the life of an only child living in postwar Bucharest, a city that is changing in ever more frightening ways. Eva's family, full of eccentric and opinionated adults, will do absolutely anything to keep her safe—even if it means hiding her identity from her. With razor-sharp depictions of her animated relatives, Haya Leah Molnar's memoir of her childhood captures with touching precocity the very adult realities of living behind the iron curtain.

Under a Red Sky is a 2011 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

Under a Red Sky: Memoir of a Childhood in Communist Romania Details

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Author : Haya Leah Molnar

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Julia says

I was transported back in time, imagining the arduous life my parents and grandparents experienced in Communist Romania and the subsequent trek to America and the sacrifice of everything my grandparents knew, which I am so grateful for.

Thanks for the recommendation, @Katie.

Sarai says

This was not a bad book; it's just a little dry to be in the YA section. It is told from - I believe - a 9-year old's perspective. I can't remember if she was 9 or 11, but I think 9. Most times the story seemed to be from someone younger.

There was a lot the child did not understand, which is fine, but it was never explained so the reader could understand it, which was quite frustrating. The questions the child had remained unanswered by the adults around her, so there was also no resolution for the reader. Someone not familiar with the history of Romania would finish this book and be no wiser as to the events which unfolded there and how things came about.

There were other things left in the air - did she ever see her friends Claudia or Andrei again? How long was her family in Israel before immigrating to the United States? Did her parents stay together? Once they reached Israel, how did they get along as far as finding a place to live or a means of employment? It all just stopped abruptly when they got to Israel and would have been more satisfying if there had been some sort of brief wrap-up.

Product Description

Eva Zimmermann is eight years old, and she has just discovered she is Jewish. Such is the life of an only child living in postwar Bucharest, a city that is changing in ever more frightening ways. Eva's family, full of eccentric and opinionated adults, will do absolutely anything to keep her safe—even if it means hiding her identity from her. With razor-sharp depictions of her animated relatives, Haya Leah Molnar's memoir of her childhood captures with touching precocity the very adult realities of living behind the iron curtain.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

What I couldn't believe, during the entire time I was reading this memoir of life in Communist Romania, was how bad the housing shortage was and how Jews were still being persecuted in the late 1950's when I was born! Imagine, feeling lucky to be able to rent a bedroom in an apartment occupied by so many other people! Eva (the author Haya's original name) was lucky that everyone crammed into their apartment was related to each other, at least until her grandparents emigrated to Israel and their bedroom was rented by a young couple. I just can't imagine it. And I (naively) thought that persecuting Jews on a national level ended with World War II. And all this was going on when I was growing up, and I was unaware of it all. I feel so lucky that I grew up in the USA.

The library I borrowed this book from catalogued it as a juvenile (J) book, but, although the narrator, Eva, is in their equivalent of elementary school at the time, she reports events and conversations that are definitely adult, so I would classify this as YA. In fact, near the beginning, she quotes some foul language that made me surprised that it would ever be considered J.

This book was a real eye-opener for me, so I recommend it for teens who might like to know what it was like living in a Communist country at that time. Recommended.

Anika says

Don't really care for this book, honestly. 3.5. Not rating it intently because I read it for my Memoir Unit at school, sooooo, yeah.

Adrienne says

Living in Communist Romania after WWII, life wasn't much better for the Jews than it was during the war. Eva, however, who is a child living with her parents, grandparents, and two uncles, and a an aunt, didn't know that she was Jewish. She did know that her family didn't agree with the Communist government and that their dream was to emigrate to Israel, where they wouldn't all have to live in one small apartment and where they'd be able to find better jobs and speak freely. Once she became aware of her status as a Jew, she still doesn't understand what it means to be Jewish, only that it's dangerous.

I enjoyed reading Eva's story, since Communist Romania isn't a topic I know much about. I think Eva's family dynamics were particularly interesting. I was a little disappointed with the ending; this, as indicated in the title, is the story only of Eva's life in Communist Romania, but since her family was able to move to Israel when she was ten, there's still much about Eva's life that we don't get to see, and for me, it just felt like it ended a little too soon.

Sylvia says

This is overall an amazing book that I would recommend! Although the beginning was a bit hard to get into, once I did get into it the rest of the book was great!

Cam Zak says

“Communism has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion.” (Billy Graham) This quote speaks best with the book, *Under a Red Sky*. Living under Communist rule is the epitome of evil as many people would say. Anti-Semitism was the largest role in this memoir, singling out the religion of the Jewish people living in Bucharest, Romania. *Under a Red Sky* captures the precocity of the graphic and realistic truth behind a hidden identity of a girl in her childhood years. *Under a Red Sky* is an exciting book because it provides the reader with a 1st person view, real life imagery and factuality of living under a communist rule.

Under a Red Sky is a superb book due to its extraordinarily vivid depictions of struggling to live under a communist rule. Eva Zimmermann, the main character, writes this memoir attempting to show the audience the struggles her and her family had to deal with during the 1950's communist rule in Romania. The Zimmermann clan was a close family, depending on one another to make everyday life manageable although they were wildly temperamental; they helped Eva through the toughest times. Anti-Semitism was at an all time high in Europe throughout the early and mid 20th century. Eva said, "How come no one ever told me that I'm Jewish?" (Zimmermann 159). This was the big deal in the whole story because the family didn't want Eva to know, for fear of people finding out and something happening to her. Eva's determination to live every day to the fullest was now compromised and the family had to act quickly. This shows that the family was fully committed to helping each other. Another way this book was made depictive was from how Eva viewed each family member in the 1st person view.

This book never directly followed one person; Eva involved everyone in the story to be more interactive. The most unique part of this all was the way she stayed in the 1st person while interacting with everyone, although there was an occasional involvement of the 3rd person. Two chapters that really stand out in the book are chapter 5, The house (pg. 31-41) and Chapter 8, What the communist Party means to me (pg. 52-59). Chapter 5 is really the chapter that is explained through the 3rd person simply because everyone and everything is mentioned; really giving the reader the first glimpse of what this memoir has to offer. Chapter 8 is when Eva fully starts beginning the 1st person journey and getting into her daily life, beginning at school. Eva is a young child, and her experiences at school are still weak, but the complication of hiding her true identity makes it a wild adventure. Communist teachers and officials are all over the city trying to crack down on the Jewish people (Anti-Semitism). Eva has always been an optimistic person though, and the roughness of communist people all around her doesn't faze her at all. Eva's determination leads the book into the realm of the Jewish future.

Under a Red Sky provides the reader with a sense of uncertainty, making them wonder if Eva and her family will ever get out of the communist rule in Romania. The 1950's were a rough time all throughout Europe, but lesser-known countries, such as Romania, suffered a great deal more than most countries. Communism was just getting into its major part of history; devastating everything under its sovereign rule. Eva and her family have put up with the majority and have finally had enough. Jerusalem was seeking back its own native people, stranded in those suffering countries. There comes a time, when loved ones come and go, and family becomes even closer... "You never know what empty is until you feel the absence of someone you love." (Zimmermann 241). Eventually, all of the family met up and re-settled back in Jerusalem. As they reminisce of the harsh memories of living under a communist rule terrifies them. Living today, we will never know what actually happened back then and stories will only give the perspective of the actual person. The perspective that Eva gave was extraordinary; living day to day, hiding your Jewish identity and being happy on top of that.

The imagery displayed in Under a Red Sky made it a wonderful book, one that most people should read when they want to learn about the era of Communism. Under a Red Sky speaks to the audience about how they lived day to day, managing life under one roof with a family of 8. The bravery of this family makes one incredible story that just makes the reader actually step into the life of Eva Zimmermann and live her life with her. Haya Leah Molnar did an excellent job of this memoir and her life will always be remembered through this story.

Taylor says

In the book Under a Red Sky by Haya Leah Molnar, it is about a little girl named Eva who lives in a house with her mom and dad, her Aunt Puica and Uncle Max, her Uncle Natan, and her Grandma Iulia and

Grandpa Yosef. She goes to school everyday and is told not to repeat anything that is said in their house, for they say bad things about the communist party and could get in big trouble for it. They want to move to Israel but cannot because the communists won't let anybody immigrate. When almost everybody in their house goes and tries to get a passport, they all lose their jobs and have to live off half of Uncle Max's salary. Eva learns that she is a Jew and goes to study what that means in secret with a rabbi. The adults that she lives with love her so much and will do anything to protect her.

I would recommend this book to anybody who likes memoirs and who likes stories of families after a war, and not during a war. This a good book and an eight year old girl is the narrator so we see things from her perspective on life after the war and what it feels like to be kept in the dark about some things. This is a book that a lot of people would like and it is a little boring and slow but it is written well and has a good plot. I liked this book because it gives you a new perspective on life after the war because many books are written during the war. This was a good book overall and I think a lot of people would like it.

Marcos says

The book I read was "Under a Red Sky: Memoir of a Childhood in Communist Romania". The good thing about the book was that it was a memoir of a child's life of the Holocaust so we get to feel or read about how they felt and how their lifestyles were during the Holocaust.

The bad thing about this book is that there is rarely any action. And that is all I have for the bad things about the book.

I would recommend this book to people who are into history because the whole book is based on the Holocaust and what the kid has to go through during this time of the Holocaust.

Mark says

Under a Red Sky is a well-written memoir that is informative and entertaining. Eva is a great character who provides a young child's view of persecution of Jews in Communist Romania. The writing is clear and vivid, and unlike some autobiographies Molnar's memories of her childhood are so complete, I almost felt as if the book was historical fiction. Her touching escape from Romania to Israel is well-thought out, and the book will alarm anyone at the hypocritical persecution of Jews and religion in general by Communism. I, for one, had not known about the treatment of Jews by the USSR and its allies before I read this book, and the book really elucidates this little-known point in history. The mini-storyline with Eva going to Hebrew School is interesting to contemplate as a Jew and someone interested in religious history because of the obvious disrespect for Eva in a school comprised of all boys. However, frequent references to tobacco use, although true to the story, make the book inappropriate for younger children who would be old enough to read it except for that. In conclusion, *Under a Red Sky* is a beautiful piece that explores the little-known atrocities of the Communist bloc.

JACOB YOUNG says

Personal Response: I really didn't enjoy this book. It took me a really long time to read. I thought it was rather boring start and it never really drew me in. However it was a well written book. I just am not a fan of stories like this.

Plot: The book was about a young girl growing under communism. She lived in the town of Bucharest, Romania. She lived with her whole family in one house. The relationships in the house weren't always nice. Her aunt did not like her father. They were always fighting and it made it unpleasant for her to grow up in the house. She was learning what it was like to grow up under communism. They didn't live a nice lifestyle like they did before the communist party took over. Her grandfather used to be a very rich man. He was a shop owner and a very popular man in Bucharest. Anna learns fast that communism isn't as nice as their leaders would want you to believe.

Characters: Anna was the main character. She was a young girl who lived in house with her whole family. She was very curious and wanted to know everything she could. She was always with her grandfather Yosef. Yosef was a very popular man in Bucharest. He often received things that others didn't because of his connections. He was a very peaceful man as well. His wife was unhappy about the change in her life. She was used to having cooks clean for her. She always said what was on her mind.

Setting: The book takes place in Bucharest, Romania. The town is small and mainly consists of a market and shops. The apartment the Zimmerman's live in is made up of 5 rooms. Each member of the family gets a room and they have a kitchen. The town is under communist rule so all the food is scarce.

Theme: I would say the theme to this book is family is very important. Throughout the story the family has rough patches, but they always try to stick together.

Recommendation: I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys history or is wondering what life is like under communist rule. I think this book has a reading level more suited for those over 15. I would say both genders would enjoy this book.

Lila Willis says

The memoir *Under a Red Sky* by Haya Leah Molnar is the story of a young girl struggling to survive in communist Romania in the late 1950s to the early 1960s. Haya lives in a very large family with her mother, her father, her Aunt Puica, her Uncle Max, her Grandma Iulia, her Grandpa Yosef, and her housekeeper Sabina. Haya is very excited to begin her life as a young adult, but she had trouble because she is different from other kids. Her family faces many challenges with the added problem of them being Jewish. The family faces sickness, job loss, and fear. Despite these hardships, she tries very hard to be the best student she can

possibly be, and to make as many friends as she can, without revealing too much about her family. Through the family's attempt to escape the communist government, and to keep their family from falling apart, they learn many things about themselves and each other, essentially becoming a much closer family.

Donna says

Eva Zimmerman/Haya Leah Molnar is upfront about the challenges in piecing a book together from her memories in her author's note at the beginning of the book. "The story is filtered through my memory," she writes, and also, "this is not a journalist's rendition of historical events but my personal story about growing up." Some names have been changed to protect people's privacy, and some conversations have been re-imagined, but the "essence" is true.

Her candor is evident throughout her story, which has no clear villains and few hugely dramatic events. Instead, she relies on the color provided by her family members (she grows up as the only child in a house filled with adults) and the quietly dramatic revelations that unfold over time. If there is a villain in the story, then it is the unseen, uncaring government bureaucracy which looms as a constant threat to her family's well-being.

The trials of Eva's childhoods include many that most anyone can identify with, like trying to fit in at school when you are different, getting along with family members who can be affectionate but rude, frustration at not understanding religion or your parents and worrying when your parents are unemployed. Others, like not being allowed to leave the country and not being allowed to take your possessions when you are allowed to leave, may tap in to the imaginations of those who read to experience circumstances far removed from their own.

Eva's father was a filmmaker and photographer, and several of his family photographs appear in a section towards the back of the book, strengthening her account. She doesn't just include them as window-dressing, but ingeniously incorporates them fully into her memories, telling the stories of how the photographs came to be so that when I saw the pictures, I said, for instance, "Aha! That is how she looked on her first day or school!"

Laura says

This memoir reminded me of *Leaving Glorytown* (they're even set at a similar time), exploring what it was like living under a Communist regime and what happens when you decide the Worker's Paradise isn't, well, paradise.

Here, Ms. Molnar's family is a group of Jews (something she's unaware of until about age 8) living in Bucharest. Her father was in a Nazi concentration camp and then Soviet *lagers*, her mother's family survived the war in Romania. Her stories of the deprivation they suffered (although the fact that they had a maid belies real deprivation!), and her experiences at school (she becomes a proud member of the Communist Pioneers) and with the non-family members she meets (her neighbor, Andrei, feels her head for Jewish horns) are engaging enough to interest readers a little tired of this genre.

One of the things I appreciated most was that in the foreword, we're told that the stories are based on

memories enhanced by others' comments/stories: we are not expected to believe that at this remove, all dialog and events are remembered exactly as they happened. It would be great if other memoirists included the same disclaimer.

Free ARC provided by publisher.

Tasha says

A memoir of childhood under Communism, this book offers a real window into that world. Growing up in postwar Bucharest, Romania, Eva lives with her extended family in one house. This includes her grandparents, her parents, two uncles and one aunt. Eva is surprised at age 8 to discover that her family is Jewish, though readers will know it from the start. All of her relatives are unique and interesting. Her father, a filmmaker, survived the Nazi concentration camps. Her mother is a former ballerina who teaches dance to children. Her Aunt Puica spends most of her time in her bedroom reading romance novels while her husband, Uncle Max is running into trouble at work for joking too much about the Communists. Uncle Natan is a bachelor who still lives at home. Her grandmother is prickly and her grandfather is doting. The mix of all of these strong characters forms the background of Eva's life. They quarrel, fight, make up, love, and joke. It is a family of very human people who are trapped behind the iron curtain, living lives so similar to our own and yet so very different and frightening.

Molnar has set just the right tone with this book. Its universal qualities of family and childhood are played out against the repressiveness of Romanian Communism, yet it is not grim. Moments of humor and humanity shine against the darkness, incandescent against the horrors of Communism. As the book moves on, Eva begins to understand the dangers of her life, creating a tension that makes for intense reading.

Molnar's depiction of her relatives is told with great relish and delight. They are the sort of family members who shape who you are, and readers can see them shaping Eva as we watch. Each person has their own distinct style and reactions, they are vividly depicted and as the pressures of Communism grow around them, become more and more themselves. The characters are what make this book a pleasure to read, their colorful lives more than enough relief from what could have been a very grim tale.

Highly recommended, this book offers a memoir that reads like good historical fiction. Appropriate for ages 9-12.
