



Anna's Story: A Latvian Tale of Love, War and Peace.

Anna Lejins

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Anna's Story: A Latvian Tale of Love, War and Peace. Anna Lejins

This is a memoir of a Latvian English teacher who recounts what it was like to live through the momentous events that shaped the first half of the Twentieth Century. Through simple but poignant language she takes the reader from life in the Latvian countryside to the Revolution of 1905 in Latvia, then part of Tsarist Russia, life in Russia during the First World War and the Russian revolution, then her return to Latvia and the War of National Liberation in Latvia against Germany and Russia. She tells of life in independent Latvia, her schooling and education as an English language teacher, her trip to London and Berlin and her marriage to Eduards or Teddy as she called him. He had been caught up in the Russian Civil War and found himself fighting in four different armies until with a Latvian unit he was able to return to Latvia travelling across Siberia to Vladivostok and then by ship from Japan to Latvia. They are both teachers and Anna describes in detail the life of a middle class family until the Second World War shatters their dreams and hopes in Latvia. First Latvia is occupied by the Soviet Union and then by Nazi Germany. Through Anna's eyes we see the reign of communist terror and changes this brings to her school. Her brother, his wife and two small children are deported to Siberia. The Soviet nightmare is replaced by the Nazi German occupation after Hitler turns against his former ally Stalin. Anna is interrogated by the Gestapo, luckily by a Latvian, who sees that she has been wrongly denounced. She describes the war years on her parent's farm where she and her family have taken refuge and their attempt to save the school's Jewish doctor by signing a petition together with the other teachers and students addressed to the German occupation authorities. Her humanity shines forth in the family's treatment of a Russian prisoner-of-war assigned to them by the German army to work on the farm. Tragedy strikes as she loses her first born child. With the approach of the Red Army the family of three small children, one boy suffering from tuberculosis of the spine and unable to walk, the other two years old, and a baby girl of only two weeks flee to Germany to find refuge with millions of other refugees with the incoming British and American forces. Many refugees perish during the bombardment of Dresden which Anna witnesses a day after the bombs had dropped as her family trek on foot from Dresden to Oldenburg in northern Germany. On the way they are caught up in no-man's land between the advancing American army and retreating German army. Her son Atis, after being lost, is treated with chocolate by American soldiers before his mother, panic-stricken, finds him. Arriving at a refugee camp at war's end her husband Eduards collapses on the threshold of the refugee building stricken by tuberculosis of the lung. She lovingly nurses him back to health without medical care and the family is taken to Australia in 1960 by a former American troop carrier ship. Anna's Story ends here. In a concluding chapter her son Atis describes how he returned to his homeland from Australia via America, Europe, and Afghanistan. He explains how Latvian independence was regained and what is being done to ensure her long-term freedom.

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