



Family History of Fear: A Memoir

Agata Tuszynska

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“Family History of Fear has been in me for years. Along with this secret. From the instant I found out I was not who I thought I was.”

Every family has its own history. Many families carry a tragic past. Like the author’s mother, many Poles did not tell their children a complete story of their wartime exploits—of the underground Home Army, the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising, the civil war against the Communists. Years had to pass before the stories of suffering and heroism could be told.

In *Family History of Fear*, Agata Tuszynska, one of Poland’s most admired poets and cultural historians, writes of the stories she heard from her mother about her secret past.

Tuszynska, author of *Vera Gran* (“a book of extraordinary depth and power”—Richard Eder, *The Boston Globe*; “captivating”—*Newsweek*; “darkly absorbing, shrewd, and sharply etched”—*Publishers Weekly*), has written a powerful memoir about growing up after the Second World War in Communist Poland—blonde, blue-eyed, and Catholic.

The author was nineteen years old and living in Warsaw when her mother told her the truth—that she was Jewish—and began to tell her stories of the family’s secret past in Poland. Tuszynska, who grew up in a country beset by anti-Semitism, rarely hearing the word “Jew” (only from her Polish Catholic father, and then, always in *derision*), was unhinged, ashamed, and humiliated. The author writes of how she skillfully erased the truth within herself, refusing to admit the existence of her other half.

In this profoundly moving and resonant book, Tuszynska investigates her past and writes of her journey to uncover her family’s history during World War II—of her mother at age eight and *her* mother, entering the Warsaw Ghetto for two years as conditions grew more desperate, and finally escaping just before the uprising, and then living “hidden on the other side.” She writes of her grandfather, one of five thousand Polish soldiers taken prisoner in 1939, becoming, later, the country’s most famous radio sports announcer; and of her relatives and their mysterious pasts, as she tries to make sense of the hatred of Jews in her country. She writes of her discoveries and of her willingness to accept a radically different definition of self, reading the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer, opening up for her a world of Polish Jewry as he became her guide, and then writing about his life and work, circling her Jewish self in *Lost Landscapes: In Search of Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Jews of Poland*.

A beautiful and affecting book of discovery and acceptance; a searing, insightful portrait of Polish Jewish life, lived before and after Hitler’s Third Reich.

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