



Anya's War

Andrea Alban Gosline

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Anya Rosen and her family have left their home in Odessa for Shanghai, believing that China will be a safe haven from Hitler's forces. At first, Anya's life in the Jewish Quarter of Shanghai is privileged and relatively carefree: she has crushes on boys, fights with her mother, and longs to defy expectations just like her hero, Amelia Earhart.

Then Anya finds a baby--a newborn abandoned on the street. Amelia Earhart goes missing. And it becomes dangerously clear that no place is safe--not for Jewish families like the Rosens, not for Shanghai's poor, not for adventurous women pilots.

Based on a true story, here is a rich, transcendent novel about a little-known time in Holocaust history.

Anya's War Details

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Author : Andrea Alban Gosline

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From Reader Review Anya's War for online ebook

Julie Goot says

A great window into a fascinating and horrific time period set in Shanghai and from a child's perspective. Loved how the author explored the innermost thoughts of Anya, and painted a picture of everyday reality with the ominous backdrop of what is yet to come. I can't wait to read more about Anya's world - I am looking forward to a Book 2! A must read for all middle school and high school reading

Ruth says

This is the kind of book people write up because they have too much time on their hands and just go fired from their job.

I always compare books to food, but this time is an exception. So go rest your eyes or something before you read what I'm about to write next.

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Okay. Here goes:

You know those cakes that look all pretty and stuff in the shop window, and you feel that need to buy it so much because its appearance is so pretty and you feel like you'll never see a prettier cake in your life ever again and besides, it would be the PERFECT cake to buy for that special occasion although you could care less for the person or event it's celebrating and you know that you're probably going to be the only person eating that cake because there will be a lot of other cakes and dessert delicacies there at the event? So you go ahead, say SCREW IT and buy the cake, only to "realize" that you'd gotten the date of that notorious event wrong and it's actually next week, so you go home, walk into your kitchen, rip apart that fancy box which the cake had been implanted in, get out your prettiest china plate to match the prettiest cake you've ever seen in your life, cut yourself an ample slice of that gorgeous masterpiece, and slowly take a bite, preparing to savor the moment and the taste.

Then you realize.

Oh no.

You've been robbed. You've been cheated, been as blind as the old lady next door.

You failed to consider the facts before you'd gone ahead and bought that false jewel.

As pretty as cakes look on the outside, as magnificently adorned, garnished, whipped, ornamented, or even sauteed to perfection, it's actually the plain cake that will win you over. Both the frosting on top and the cake inside have to fit as well as, well as well as PB&J.

(Yes, i did just notice that i used the word "sautee". You can't sautee a cake, can you?)

Okay, I've given part one of my comparison, I just need to explain how that fits into this book, and countless other sh!tty books such as this one.

This book had promise. A great idea, plot, and a fabulously clever book cover. (Now i'm just exaggerating. But i liked the book cover). But from page three, you began to notice something wrong. Books need a direct PLOT, something that should be prominent sometime in the first to second shapter.

This didn't happen.

Page after page after page after page was overflowing with a strenuous amount of information, facts, and other not necessarily useful stuff to know. The exposition seemed to go on forever, and by the time I'd gotten to the 10 page, I felt ready to die. THERE WAS NO DIRECT PLOT. All it was, was a large, meandering, useless junky trashy book of INFORMATION! INFORMATION IS GOOD. BUT WHEN IT'S EXPLOITED AND HAS EXHAUSTED ITSELF OUT LIKE IN THIS BOOK, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR THE CHARACTERS TO BECOME INTERESTING, THE PLOT TO BECOME PLOTTY, OR FOR A STORY TO ACTUALLY DEVELOP.

I absolutely hate it when authors do this to their readers. They seem to think they can get away with presenting a person with a bright idea, (which in my mind is as good as any Christmas present) then completely going under the roof and taking that bright idea apart, piece by piece by piece.

Yes, I am done with my review. Or rant. Or whatever this sort of thing may be called. I just realized that I didn't even technically write a review. It was more like the confessions of some madwoman from an Edgar Allan Poe story who's gone bipolar and burned all her books.

I just made that up.

Okay, I have a confession. That cake comparison? I'd made that up completely. Actually, I don't like cake very much at all. But i can tell a bad cake from a normal cake.

I know what you're thinking, WHO FRIGGEN CARES ABOUT THE CAKE, YOU JUST WASTED TEN MINUTES OF MY LIFE.

I'm sorry.

I apologize.

But i just felt the need to write out my feelings on the ridiculous way that books are getting published these days.

They can be sold with a bright, garishly attracting cover, yet when readers actually go and read the book, they realize that it's nothing but a giant, dry, crackly base cake.

Becky says

This book wasn't really what I thought, but I still enjoyed it. The author captured the thoughts and feelings of a 14-year-old girl really well.

Katy Morrical says

i really thought this was going to be a different type of story than what it was. I found it choppy and missing a good flow. Not a fan.

Claire Hattendorf says

This book was a page turner for me. I couldn't put it down! The research that went into this book created an all-consuming view of a horrible past for the Jews. The author writes in a way that takes the reader 'right there' inside the story.

I'm so proud to know Andrea; it's great to have a friend that is such an accomplished writer!

Barb VanderWel says

wtg. love it love it

Barb says

Would give 3.5 stars. Part of Holocaust/WWII history I didn't know. Jews fled to China from Russia. This was based on the author's father's life but story changed to the viewpoint of a 14 yr old girl.

Teresa says

So much potential with this one, but I struggled to get fully engaged until the last great chapters. Learned a lot about shabbat customs, though, which was more interesting than the actual plot

Vivian Murray says

Currently I am reading all things "Shanghai" and since my mom was a girl growing up in Shanghai, I found

Anya's War to be an interesting perspective. Simple read but a fresh perspective of a complex subject in a very multi-cultural city during the beginning of WWII.

Margo Tanenbaum says

In her debut novel for young adults, San Francisco writer Andrea Alban mines her own family history to weave a compelling coming-of-age story of a fourteen-year old Russian-Jewish girl and her family in 1937 Shanghai. Anya and her family had left their comfortable life in Odessa, where Mama was an opera singer and Papa was a journalist, because Papa wouldn't join the Communist Party, and sought safety from the Russian Secret Police in far-off Shanghai, then a safe-haven for many Jews.

The story opens with Anya writing a list of wishes in her diary. Their servant, Li Mei, has told her that planting wishes under a full moon gives them the best chance of coming true. What does a 14-year old girl in 1937 Shanghai wish for?

She wishes Amelia Earhart, her idol, will be found safe somewhere in the Pacific. She also struggles with telling her mother the truth about her hopes for the future--going to university in the United States, not becoming an opera singer like her mother. "I am absolutely, one hundred percent certain that I don't want to sing opera. I think." And she's trying to think of something witty to say to a boy she likes at the bowling club, hoping her right bosom will grow extra fast to catch up without her left side, and last but not least, wishing "the Japanese would stop killing Chinese children by accident."

But Anya's life changes when she discovers, on her way home from purchasing the family's food for Sabbath dinner, an abandoned basket with an unwanted newborn girl baby inside. What should she do? The baby was thrown away by her family, but Jews don't throw out baby girls, Anya tells herself. "All girls are precious. We're all the same." She impulsively decides to take the baby home with her, where she is helped by her best friend, Giselle, and Li Mei. Will her mother allow her to keep the baby safe? But Anya soon learns that no place is safe, especially for her new friend Gabriel and his father, who fled anti-semitism in Italy, or even in Shanghai, where unexpected danger lurks.

Alban paints a detailed picture of the exotic Jewish life in Shanghai, from the trip to the kosher butcher to the synagogue to celebrating the Sabbath rituals in their home, with a meal cooked by their Chinese servant. She writes with great affection for her characters and their hopes and fears, and young readers will readily identify with Anya and her companions. The author incorporates some romance as well, as Anya dreams about boys and even gets her first (very innocent) kiss.

An author's note explains how Alban grew up hearing stories of her father's Jewish childhood in the French Quarter of Shanghai, China, and how the small community of 4,000 Jews swelled to 20,000 with the influx of Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler. The Jews that arrived after 1937 were herded by the Japanese invaders into the Hongkew Ghetto, a little-known chapter of Holocaust history.

This book is the first in a trilogy that will go through the end of World War II, and subsequent volumes will tell more about Anya's family and this fascinating chapter in history.

Elise Holland says

Uprooted from her home in Odessa, Anya and her family must make their way in 1937 Shanghai. As if the political climate isn't bad enough, the boy she likes is impossibly out of her league. She and her family do their best to adapt to Chinese customs, while holding fast to their Jewish traditions but when Anya finds an abandoned baby girl and decides to bring her home, it appears nothing will be the same again.

ANYA'S WAR is a beautifully- written story about a Jewish girl on the cusp of womanhood. With evocative descriptions of places and emotions, I was transported into the life of this incredibly colorful family. This is an excellent read for children aged 10 and up.

Charles Weinblatt says

Anya's War is a tender coming-of-age tale of a Jewish girl whose family escaped to Shanghai from the impending Nazi takeover of their home in Russia. Fourteen year-old Anya Rosen's father believed that China would be a safe reprieve for Jews escaping from Hitler's vow to punish the Jewish people. Although the characters are fictional, the story is real and based upon the author's ancestors.

Alban's compelling characters elucidate the very real terror of Jews living in China during the early years of the Holocaust. Anya's War is rich with metaphor and reality, a powerful combination during an explosive era of world war and genocide. Alban delivers a persuasive dose of a dichotomous society where timeless class structure results in domination of the wealthy over the poor. Anya was raised in a moderately wealthy family in Odessa, which was transformed into an upper-class family in China. She soon became immersed within a culture that included suffering, yet devoted servants and the condescending wealthy.

Anya arrives as a typical adolescent, filled with curiosity, plans within plans and a burgeoning interest in boys. Like many adolescent girls of the time, Anya has natural heroes. She greatly admires Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt. She also plans to live in The United States and become a physician, like her aunt. Like all teenagers, Anya fights with her parents. She is especially defiant with her dominating mother, who has other plans for Anya's career. At the same time, Anya explores deepening feelings for a boy in her class at school.

Woven into Anya's life are her doting parents, grandparents, brother, friends and servants. Except for her parents, these characters possess rudimentary depth. Yet, the events and circumstances surrounding Anya are described with delightful depth. Alban's descriptions of life in China are terrific and she pulls the reader along with vibrant flow and intensity.

Because she lives in relative wealth and attends the Jewish school in Shanghai, the morass of subjugation, starvation and hopelessness prevalent among Chinese remains just below Anya's radar. Anya races around Shanghai in her bicycle, visiting friends and running errands. She has a new camera which she uses to take pictures along her way. Anya takes advantage of her newly-acquired ability to bargain with sellers in the market.

One day, Anya discovers an discarded newborn girl in a basket. She brings the baby home, to the horror of the entire household. Anya immediately loves and cares for the abandoned child. She is determined to keep the baby and proffers the child a name. At the same time, her father brings home a new Jewish family in Shanghai, including a boy who sweeps Anya off her feet.

One day, Anya's younger brother follows her on an unapproved trip into Shanghai, during which a Chinese bomber accidentally drops bombs upon the city. The resulting disaster leaves Anya's brother seriously injured. Alone and deeply frightened, Anya must find a way to save her brother's life.

Alban brings to light that mystifying, confusing time of life in which Anya is neither child nor adult, but some confusing stage in between. This story becomes an exploration of adolescent desire and passion, a newfound freedom chained with responsibility, underpinned by the desire to remain a part of a nurturing, loving family.

Alban's writing style is structured, cogent and evocative. Her protagonist and the primary characters are entertaining, well developed and delivered with expressive dialog. They induce depth and fervor. Anya's character is powerful and seductive. One can feel her empathy, defiance, curiosity and passion. However, the secondary characters are less well developed, leaving the reader with a somewhat murky sense of their personality features. The family's Jewish identity is carefully elucidated through the manner in which they honor the Sabbath, observe holidays, recall the past and enjoy valued traditions. Interspersed in the dialog are Yiddish words used to convey more expressive meaning.

Anya's War is a powerful novel of cultures, adolescent emotions, aspiration, passion, fear and anticipation. Within it, we glimpse wartime China, its deep-seated traditions, structures, classes and beauty. Alban also delivers the devastation, anxiety and terror of war. Here we find a bright, expressive teenager named Anya, who is struggling to become an independent young adult, learning valuable life lessons from venerable servants, friends and family. The pace of this novel increases exponentially, with an explosive conclusion.

Samantha Hastings says

Author Andrea Alban packs a lot of character development, culture, and history in her novel about two days in Shanghai. Teens will find the story compelling and Anya's character to be likeable and entirely relatable. Despite what is happening around her, Anya is still a teenage girl who is worried about her bra size, cute boys, and telling her parents about her dreams for the future.

Kinzie Anderson says

The book was great, some parts were a little confusing...I'm glad I'm not the only one who thought so. But overall I enjoyed it and would recommend it.

Allison says

This is historical fiction for real lovers of historical fiction. Although there are a few well-crafted sequences of suspense that will appeal even to those who typically shun historical fiction, most of the narrative is devoted to detailing Anya's daily life in Shanghai, and will be best appreciated by those who truly love to immerse themselves in another time and place.

Full review at Reading Everywhere.
