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During World War II, a Jewish orphan is living with her aunt and uncle when she is rounded up with other Jews, and sent to live in a peasant household. When her Judaism is discovered, she is asked to leave and wanders from village to village, confused by the threat that hangs over her, but maintained by a fierce belief in her eventual return to her family.

Katarina Details

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From Reader Review Katarina for online ebook

Hazel says

In this semi-autobiographical novel, eight-year-old Katarina is bewildered by the hullabaloo surrounding her Jewish heritage in World War II at Slovakia. Raised by her unobservant aunt Lena, Katarina knows next to nothing about her supposed religion and heritage. In public school, she's a Jew. In Hebrew school, she's a heathen. But in her heart of hearts, she's a Catholic.

Taught in secret by her stepfather's maid, Katarina knows the history of the saints by heart and even goes to mass. Her Catholic lessons prove valuable when her aunt and uncle pass her off as a Catholic and leave her with a peasant family, promising to return in two weeks time. When two weeks have come and gone several times over, the superstitious villagers grow fearful of the red-haired (rare in Slovakia) Katarina and begin to accuse her of cursing their livestock. And when they discover she is Jewish, they cast her out.

Left with nowhere to go, Katarina wanders from village to village, hungry and alone, constantly at risk. She eventually seeks refuge with her uncle's former maid, and it is Anka who comes up with the plan that saves her life. Throughout her three-year ordeal, Katarina is sustained by her faith in her saintly protectors, the unexpected acts of kindness and courage on the part of others, and her belief that everything and everyone she loves will be awaiting her at the end of the war.

By the end of the war, the number of survivors is less clear. Kathryn Winter has successfully drawn on some of her own experiences growing up Jewish in World War II Slovakia to create a remarkable story that is as gripping as it is believable.

Laura says

Like I've said in previous reviews, I'm not a huge fan of stories told from a child's perspective and I think I'm beginning to realize why. It's frustrating to me when the characters have no idea why something is happening when, as an adult reader, it's incredibly obvious. It's frustrating to me when the adults in the book withhold information from the child and as a result they continue to be in the dark. Children are intelligent and understanding. Yes this topic may have scared her, but at the same time, it would have helped her be more cautious and understand why people are treating her the way they are.

Jennifer Wrage says

This book was from the point of view of a young girl in Slovakia during WWII. Although it was set in exciting places, I found the dialogue and self-reflection rather boring. Maybe it's because I have read so many of this type of book, but this one didn't really grab me.

Hannah says

I had this friend in eighth grade who recommended books to me. They were literally all depressing, [Katarina](#) included.

Laura C. says

The most fascinating part of this story is that it is semi autobiographical. That and what a child can survive.

I picked it up to learn a little more about Slovakia.

Elaine says

A story of the Holocaust taken from the author's life in Slovakia. Really interesting that the girl is labeled as Jewish but has no identity with her religion or culture. One chapter was suddenly confusing as the author changed points of view several times. Not one of my favorites.

Mazzou B says

I usually love world war 2 books, including historical fiction such as this one. However, Katarina really did not impress me. The writing style is tedious and confusing while the character herself is unlikable. Most of the book is about Katarina's crush on her older cousin Pavel. The degree of the crush was unpleasant and not sweet or cute. There is a lot about Katarina's thoughts and her going to see a witch woman and her letters to a friend and not much about the war. It is true that sometimes that is how real life was for Europeans during the war but I felt this book definitely lacked purpose. While I was reading it, I constantly wondered what the point of the book was.

For really good world war 2 fiction and biographies/memoirs, see my world war 2 shelf here on goodreads.

Cobygirl517 says

This book changes writing style and narratives so often, it gets kind of confusing at times. Not to mention, it is impressive how cruel almost everyone is to this innocent child, children and adults alike. Add on top of that the strange relationship she has with a puppet, and you wonder if she even has the capability to turn out not un-hinged. ./

Trina Edens says

Really it's 3.5. I was drawn to this book because the main character nearly shared my name, and its plot deals with WWII. The first chapter was great, and I had high hopes. But the middle part is basically the child protagonist is just homesick and dealing with being a red-head in a school-like setting (no joke about the hair. It's a big plot point.) There's also a strong religious undercurrent throughout, and not just about Judaism. The protagonist learns a lot about Christian saints. Overall it was an alright read, but not what I was wanting.

Maya says

KATERINA is about a little Jewish girl growing up during the Holocaust. She's not old enough to understand what's going on. She is separated from her family and is trying desperately to survive and adapt. Katerina's main external conflict is, of course trying to survive. Her main internal conflict is figuring out if she's Jewish, or protestant, or catholic.

When reading this book I was able to make a text to text connection. Katerina is like Bruno in THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS. Neither knows what's going on most of the time. Both Bruno and Katerina are kind of naive and ignorant.

I would rate this book a two. That is probably because it is too young for me. Also the characters irk me. I would recommend it to somebody in about fifth or sixth grade. Or somebody who likes dumb characters.

Katarina says

I was given this book for Christmas one year, because the title character has the same name as me. It was about a year or so before I read it, but I loved it... I just remember spending an entire afternoon curled up on my bed with a box of tissues, needing to know what happened to Katarina. It was a devastatingly tragic book for me-- my heart went out to her, especially because I realized the full horror of what was happening to her homeland, even if she didn't. That was the most tragic aspect of the book-- throughout, Katarina has such hope and faith. This was the first book that brought the Holocaust home for me.

I ought to re-read it...

Bobbi says

Story of a Slovak girl who is Jewish during WWII

Erin says

I read this to see if it would be good to use with my fifth graders. I seem to be obsessed with reading books set during the time of World War II and that focus on the Holocaust. This one fell a little short. It is based on true experiences, which as always, makes the story heartbreaking. But, the character development of the main character, Katarina, was weak. She's an eight year old girl who is of Jewish heritage but is not practicing and knows nothing of her heritage. However, when they begin sending Jews away in Slovakia, her aunt and uncle leave her behind with a peasant family saying they will return in several weeks. After the two weeks come and go several times over, Katarina is sent away once her Jewish background is discovered. She is left to fend for herself on the streets and is ultimately saved by her step uncle's former maid who devises a plan to send her to an orphanage with false papers. Katarina remains there for the rest of the war sustained by her hope and faith that her loved ones will be waiting for her at the end of the war.

Beth Radziewicz says

Sad book based on the author's WW2 experience as a Jewish child. Kids should read this book.

Sally906 says

I selected this book because it was set in Slovakia – one of the places I will be visiting this year.

KATARINA had so much potential as a book but never quite made it for me as a great story. It was interesting to read about what being Jewish meant, many of the Jewish people who were caught up in the holocaust were not practicing Jews – in fact for some of them the first that they heard of their Jewish ancestry was when they were hauled off to a concentration camp. For many other millions it is a way of life, their faith, their reason for being. Katarina was Jewish only because she had been born to a Jewish mother, she had never followed any of the traditions of the faith and wasn't even sure what being Jewish meant. She converts to Catholicism as it was real for her; it gave her hope and a focus. She is very young as well, so this added to her confusion of what was happening and why.

KATARINA was a quick read, and is semi-autobiographical – meaning the author put some of her experiences into the book. This is the only book written by Kathryn Winter.
