



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

By Haya Leah Molnar

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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.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 5 Up—Molnar re-creates memories and family stories of living in postwar Romania, fleshing them out with dialogue that, while not exact, remains true to the essence of her experiences, resulting in a readable, informative, and engaging book. The only child living in a crowded flat with seven adults representing three generations, Eva is often the center of attention of her frequently squabbling anti-Communist relatives. Her life becomes more complicated when she discovers at the age of seven that she is Jewish. She tries to understand what this means, particularly in light of her father's undiscussed but hinted-at war experiences, but for once gets little help from her family. In the late 1950s, Eva's family begins the long process of applying to immigrate to Israel, and their applications result in nerve-racking visits from Communist government agents who search their apartment. Once the grandparents leave, a non-Jewish family is assigned to their room, making it unsafe for the family to communicate with one another at home. The drama isn't over when Eva and her parents finally get the chance to leave; a less-desirable route and her father's return for a missing camera cause some tense days. Enough history and background are included to help today's readers understand the context of Eva's family's situation without detracting from the story. The book would make an interesting pairing with Peter SĂ's *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (Farrar, 2007). Photographs of Molnar and her family are included.—Nancy Silverrod, *San Francisco Public Library*

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From [Booklist](#)

Molnar began life as Eva Zimmerman, an adored only child living in the apartment shared by her parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles in Bucharest, Romania. The author's loving but eccentric family sheltered her as much as possible from the harsh realities of life under communist rule, when food and housing were scarce and the Securitate, Romania's secret police, watched and listened everywhere. Her father, a cinematographer, believed in science, not God, and neither religion nor World War II were spoken of at home, so it came as a huge shock to Molnar when she learned in 1958 that her entire family had applied to emigrate to Israel and that she is Jewish. All I know is that yesterday I wasn't Jewish and today I am, says Molnar in describing her struggle to understand her new identity. As Eva pieces together her family's history, a vivid story emerges, ranging from funny, tender moments of family life to the horrific revelations of the Romanian holocaust, about which little has been written. Black-and-white family photos illustrate this poignant, memorable offering. Grades 6-9. --Lynn Rutan

Review

"In this rich, insightful memoir, Molnar offers a child's-eye view of life in Romania in the late 1950s. [Her family is] a lively, eccentric bunch brought vividly to life in a simple first-person, present-tense narration.... Black-and-white family photographs illustrate this poignant, memorable memoir." ?*Kirkus (STARRED)*

"As Eva pieces together her family's history, a vivid story emerges; ranging from funny tender moments of family life to the horrific revelations of the Romanian holocaust, about which little has been written....[a] poignant, memorable offering." ?*Booklist*

"Finely wrought moments poignantly render the political and religious complexity of Eva's childhood: her

best friend, a Christian, searches Eva's head for horns; her Jewish aunt delivers a Christmas tree; she learns that two Nazis saved her family's lives years earlier. Haunting images and humorous anecdotes combine to powerful effect in this impressive debut.:" *?Publishers Weekly (STARRED)*

"Under a Red Sky is full of odd, vivid details from a time and place in Europe that seldom figures in books for young adults." *?Wall Street Journal*

"a readable, informative, and engaging book" *?School Library Journal*

"Molnar reminiscences about the challenges faced by her Holocaust-surviving elders under a repressive regime, and the confusion she felt upon discovering she was Jewish, at the age of 8, when her parents applied for emigration to Israel." *?Tablet*

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