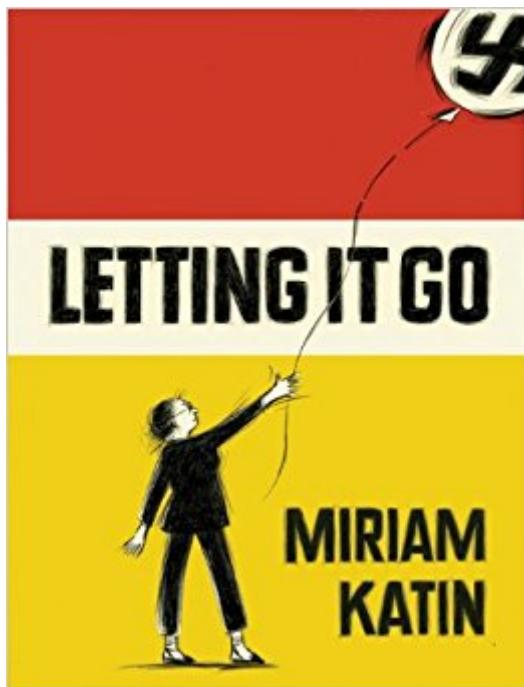


The book was found

Letting It Go



Synopsis

A Holocaust survivor struggles to let go of the pastMiriam Katin has the light hand of a master storyteller in this flowing, expressive, full-color masterpiece. A Holocaust survivor and mother, Katin's world is turned upside down by the news that her adult son is moving to Berlin, a city she's villainized for the past forty years. As she struggles to accept her son's decision, she visits the city twice, first to see her son and then to attend a museum gala featuring her own artwork. What she witnesses firsthand is a city coming to terms with its traumatic past, much as Katin is herself. Letting It Go is a deft and careful balance: wry, self-deprecating anecdotes counterpoint a serious account of the myriad ways trauma inflicts daily existence, both for survivors and for their families.Katin's first book, *We Are On Our Own*, was a memoir of her childhood, detailing how she and her mother hid in the Hungarian countryside, disguising themselves as a peasant woman and her illegitimate child in order to escape the Nazis. The stunning story, along with Katin's gorgeous pencil work, immediately garnered acclaim in the comics world and beyond. With *Letting It Go*, Katin's storytelling and artistic skills allow her to explore a voice and perspective like no other found in the medium.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Katin, a Holocaust survivor who told the harrowing story of her family's survival in her 2006 graphic memoir, *We Are on Our Own*, carries an understandable prejudice against all things German; so when her son Ilan announced that he was moving to Berlin to live with

his girlfriend there, it set off a visceral, panicked reaction that she recounts in this wise and funny work. With wry self-awareness and sardonic humor, Katin depicts her reluctant, resentful efforts to deal with her son's decision as she makes a pair of visits to the city, one to visit Ilan and another to attend an art show featuring her comics work (as her ever-patient musician husband observes, "If Barenboim can be there, so can you"). She even learns the German word for her struggle: *vergangenheitsbewältigung* •coming to terms with the past. Katin eschews the use of panel borders for her gorgeously expressive color-pencil drawings, giving the narrative an irresistible flow. As well told as it was, much of the power of *We Are on Our Own* came from its inherently dramatic story; this more nuanced and inward-looking tale is an even greater testament to Katin's remarkable storytelling abilities. --Gordon Flagg

"[Letting It Go is] thoughtful and unflinching but also frequently funny, and drawn with considerable grace." • "Miriam Katin's *Letting It Go* is my kind of graphic memoir: loose, impressionistic, a portrait of the artist's inner life." • "Los Angeles Times" • "Letting It Go is a moving, funny look inside the artist's thought processes as she reckons with her past and decides whether she's going to live out her golden years in a spirit of resentment or forgiveness." • "AV Club

Miriam Katin is a Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor who lives with her husband in New York. She is an artist and her husband is a musician. Born in 1942 in Budapest, Miriam and her mother went into hiding in the Hungarian countryside, posing as a Christian woman and her daughter, after the Germans invaded the country in 1944. She has written a previous book, "We Are On Our Own", which depicts in graphic-style the life she and her mother lived til the war was over. I haven't read many graphic novels; Katin's might be the fifth or sixth. I can't really comment on the art except to say it is drawn mostly in pencil - both gray and colored - and is very appealing to the eye. The story, though, is what really sets "Letting It Go" off from many works of Holocaust literature. Miriam Katin's book is about the journey she made - both in body and in spirit - to the city of Berlin, first in 2005 and another trip a year or so later. She had grown up as a hater of Germany and all things German. (And who would blame her?) When she was in her late 60's, her son, Ilan, told her and her husband that he had decided to settle in Berlin and was trying to adopt EU citizenship. Would she claim him as the child of a Hungarian citizen so he could claim EU status. (Even though Katin had US citizenship, she was still considered Hungarian by her place-of-birth. The exact details of this are a bit sketchy in the book.) Faced with examining her past by Ilan's request and talking it over with her

mother - the woman who had saved her life during the war - she decided to go through the onerous process of the paperwork. Next up was a trip to Berlin with her husband to visit her son and his girlfriend. The balance of the book/art is about her visits to Berlin. She is very upfront with how uncomfortable both the run up to the trips and the trips themselves were to her. But she opens up both her mind and her heart and sees Berlin as it has become in the last 20 or so years. One of the places that she visits is the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe". You may have seen pictures of it; it's the field off the Unter den Linden, near the Brandenburg Gate, with a hundreds of square stelae of differing heights. What this field is supposed to "mean" is open to question, but the memorial underneath is THE thing to see. Because this underground museum, or memorial, was built by the German government and the title is a testimony to their commitment to talk about and examine their past and admit, frankly, what went on under their watch. "Murdered Jews" - the title and the museum contents say it all. (There are other museums and monuments to others killed in the Holocaust as well; one to the murdered gay and lesbian communities is across the street from the one I'm referring to.) Miriam Katin writes and draws about the modern Berlin and how, slowly, she came to adjust her thinking and "let go" of some of her previous prejudices. Maybe the book spoke to me because the city of Berlin has "spoken" to me on my five or so trips there in the past 20 years. And maybe it spoke to me because I admired Miriam and her "journey" to an uncomfortable past that she was able to face down. I've made this review more "personal" than most of the ones I write because Katin's book provoked those feelings in me. The combination of words and drawing gives her book a close-to-the heart feeling. She appears to have ended her trips to Berlin (the second was a trip to see some of her work featured in an art exhibit) with a new feeling of acceptance. It's quite a book.

This book was recommended to me by a daily newsletter I get called "Jewniverse." This was my first graphic novel, but it didn't do much for me. I felt that the story wasn't very gripping despite the content. The illustrations are very good and help the story, but the plot itself wasn't as riveting as I had hoped.

I welcome Ms. Katin's honesty in sharing her personal story. The drawings were superior. Will be following her career and looking forward to see her other works.

Like several books I have reviewed before this one, the artist used to work for Disney. (Being a struggling cartoonist; I HAVE considered working for Disney a few times, but I want to do my own

stuff instead.) Drawn without panels in skillful colored pencils, the elderly narrator tells her story about living in New York City (not always glamorous), learning that her only son now lives in Berlin, Germany with his new girlfriend, and also having ugly memories about that city. The narrator had escaped from her birthplace, Hungary during the darkest days of WWII (presumably as a baby?) So naturally, she gets very upset about her kid deciding to make a home in the very same area where her Jewish people had been ruthlessly killed by the Nazi. But her son, her husband, her friends, even her former lover, etc., etc. tell her to snap out of it and BE happy for the young couple's future. So the poor narrator swallows her pride and helps her son obtain a Hungarian citizenship and even flies to Berlin with her husband to visit him. In spite of her fears, Berlin of today turns out to be a beautiful, modern city with great food, sights, attractions, etc. as well as museums and monuments to honor the Jewish victims. This helps the narrator relax a little and actually enjoy herself in spite of everything. Not only that; she even hurries right back to Berlin at her own expense to see her own work exhibited at a local art museum (and it has turned out to be a big disappointment for her, however.) Nevertheless, it's like the whole world doesn't care about the narrator's personal feelings or experiences with the past, so she has to force herself to get over it. (Yes, yes, we all know Berlin is now a pretty fairyland full of happy people, but this doesn't mean war crimes that happened there are not stern reminders that can't ever be trivialized and are now permanent part of our human history.) In addition, I am truly sorry that she is married to an arrogant, uncaring husband and that she has to put up with his rude remarks for YEARS, too! Pretty frank and even raw storytelling that even includes frontal nudity of an aged woman as well as gross scenes like a graphic C-section and tidal-wave diarrhea - all done in eye-pleasing color sketches.

Her talk about the book and its subject inspired me to purchase the book. However, her book covered the same material as her talk which was infused with more humor and pathos than the book itself. Her drawings were often effective, but the book lacked power. Although I read *Maus*, I am a newcomer to this artform and therefore may lack the requisite enthusiasm and appreciation.

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