

FLIGHT FROM FEAR

A Rabbi's Holocaust Memoir



RABBI SAMUEL CYWIAK
WITH JEFF SWESKY

2ND EDITION

Flight from Fear: A Rabbi's Holocaust Memoir (2nd Edition)

Samuel Cywiak , Jeff Swesky

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Near the end of August 1939, a nineteen-year-old rabbinical student by the name of Samuel Cywiak returned home to Wyszkow, Poland to visit his family for the high holidays; the most solemn and important period in the Jewish calendar. Days later Germany invaded Poland, initiating the start of World War II. Shortly after the occupation of Wyszkow, the Nazis marched Samuel and his father, along with a group of nearly seventy teachers and leaders from their shtetl, into the woods across from the Bug River. Thanks to the actions of his father, Samuel was the sole survivor of a mass execution. This event initiated his flight to flee the Nazis and reunite with the rest of his family. Rabbi Samuel Cywiak's Holocaust memoir, *Flight From Fear*, chronicles the six years during World War II where, not only did he survive the wraths of both Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin and witness many horrors throughout Europe, but he was ordained a rabbi, became a husband and father, and witnessed and experienced many miracles. He was ordained by Rabbi Chaim ben Zion Notealevitz in New York and later certified fit in matters of Jewish legal questions by the great Moshe Feinstein. His cousin, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, was Chief Rabbi of Israel for three terms from 1973 to 1983. Rabbi Cywiak was honored by former President of Venezuela, Carlos Andres Perez, for community service and has had a distinguished career as an Orthodox Rabbi, mohel, and cantor for over sixty years now."

Flight from Fear: A Rabbi's Holocaust Memoir (2nd Edition) Details

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From Reader Review Flight from Fear: A Rabbi's Holocaust Memoir (2nd Edition) for online ebook

Carole says

Barry Chamish reviewed this book in his The Stinger Not the Stung.

This is more than a holocaust memoir. It is like listening to a wise old rabbi tell his life story. Rabbi Cywiak really has a teacher's heart and intersperses his memoir with parables, jokes and teachings. He also gives us a glimpse into the life of the Jews in Poland before the Holocaust.

I wish the book were longer and more detailed because it was fascinating from start to finish.

Phyllis Krall says

A Rabbi's unbelievable memoir describes his struggle for survival during the Holocaust. He witnesses the death of his father and many other Jews when the Germans invade his Polish hometown. His faith in God keeps him alive while he continually studied to be a Rabbi.

Rabbi Samuel Cywiak's story is a true miracle. Reading about the Holocaust made me again realize how important it is to never forget what happened and hope that hate and discrimination will end.

Vanessa says

An important read that touches on the horrors faced by Rabbi Samuel Cywiak as he flees the Nazi regime. The writing is by no means captivating and I was primarily left hoping for more detail, emotion and depth. Regardless, no account of the Holocaust should be overlooked, especially one that introduces such an important cast of Jewish figures for further edification.

(I won this book through a Goodreads Giveaway in exchange for an honest review.)

Mary says

good memoir -- Holocaust memoir of Rabbi Samuel Cywiak, who was born in Wyszkw, Poland in 1920. It chronicles the six years during World War II where, not only did he survive the wraths of both Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin and witness many horrors throughout Europe, but he was ordained a rabbi, became a husband and father, and witnessed and experienced many miracles. He was ordained by Rabbi Chaim ben Zion Nitealevitz in New York and later certified fit in matters of Jewish legal questions by the great Moshe Feinstein. Rabbi Cywiak was honored by former President of Venezuela, Carlos Andres Perez, for community service and has had a distinguished career as an Orthodox Rabbi, mohel, and cantor for over sixty years now.

Linda Marie Marsh says

Rabbi Samuel Cywiak is a living miracle. I know that all Jewish survivors of the Holocaust are, but this man has had 8 of his 9 lives!

Initially saved from death, when Nazis rounded up his father as well as other men to be shot...he was clutched to the chest of his dad in order to be saved. THAT is the first miracle.

This book is his story, personal, sad, strong, amazing story of his survival during the worst era in history.

** I particularly love the idea that the Israelis of today would have/could have prevented the horrors of the holocaust and its maniac leaders.

I defy anyone to read this story and come away untouched.

Anne Marie says

Wonderfully written first hand account about the Holocaust.

It was difficult to read the horror but, important to do so...

This author grabbed my attention from the very first page and I couldn't put it down.

This book was a win from the Good Reads First Reads Program.

Alisha says

I had a lot of trouble on how to rate this book. On one hand it's an amazing experience and story of a survivor of the holocaust and Russia afterwards. Rabbi Cywiak lived a very full, sad, and amazing life and his story was one that needed to be told. On the other hand, a lot of this story didn't captivate me as I thought it should have. Events felt rushed, that were obviously very emotional. Deaths of his family were told in a detached and clinical way, when I know that was not how he felt. Even the death of his wife was told over one paragraph, with no descriptors.

Overall I enjoyed reading the story of this amazing man, but I was left feeling like there was so much more to tell, so much more to learn about the man behind this story. I felt as if it was rushed when it should have been given so much more detail and attention. Still, I was unable to rate it really low, because I did love the story and it kept me reading to see how everything turned out for the Rabbi. I rated it midway mainly because while the story was incredible, I feel as if it was missing a lot of detail and emotion. Still a story of another survivor is always an important read so that hopefully crimes of this magnitude will never be repeated.

Judie says

Fice stars for what Rabbi Cywiak endured and for his ability to tell his story at age 90. There is some rambling and certainly more detail would have made this story more cohesive, but for a 90 year old, his memory is incredible. Rabbi Cywiak survived despite the horrifying living conditions he was forced into during World War II and then fled from Venezuela to the United States. Truly an educated man, who spoke several languages, and was a true scholar.

Cindy says

This is great book. Rabbi Cywiak tells of his survivor story through the Holocaust and beyond. He is truly a blessed man and certainly has been favored by God. This book will be an interest to anyone who likes stories of history or a religious follower. The Rabbi gives a lot of information on the Jewish faith and history of WWII.

Susan Csoke says

Flight From Fear is Rabbi Samuel Cywiaks struggle to survive the Holocaust. It began on 9-9-39. his father was shot by the nazis. Samuel survived when his father pulled him close to his chest and shoved him in the pit when the shots rang out. By the time Samuel made it back home, his mother, sister and three younger brothers were gone. He later learned that they were all killed in Aushwitz. Through it all he made it to the U.S. with his wife and children. He was grateful to be reunited with his two older brothers. At the end of his book he wrote the following: "Hate spreads easily. If we're not careful, history will repeat itself. Another Holocaust is not impossible. Thats why we need to be extra vigilant in preventing this type of discrimination and hatred from happening again. We're all followers of the same God, so we should all be able to get along together and be good to each other. Hatred is not what God teaches" We should all adhere to his words. THANK YOU GOODREADS FIRSTREADS FOR THIS FREE BOOK!!!!

Cori says

Disclaimer: I received this book for free through Goodreads Giveaways

Because of the subject matter, I can't say I enjoyed the book, but I did find it interesting and engaging. The book is a holocaust memoir from a rabbi who lived through it, but managed to escape being sent to any of the concentration camps. It was eye-opening for me. I'd never given the displaced refugees of WWII much thought. I can't imagine living every day in terror, having to scavenge for food. Not being able to get much rest because senses are constantly heightened, ready to alert of any Nazi presence encountered. Wondering if any member of your family is still alive, just trying to find someplace safe, but still trying to study as much as possible. Many people unwilling to help in any real way because of the fear of what the Nazis would do to them. Between concentration camps and the types of events this man witnessed, it became clear to me how near to complete genocide Hitler actually came.

Cathy DuPont says

With a different subject, I might call this a 'sweet memoir' but since the subject is the memoir of a Holocaust survivor, sweet just doesn't seem to be the appropriate word. It is however, a truly first person memoir of survival by a Jew who was born and lived in Wyszkwow, Poland, just northeast of Warsaw.

Rabbi Samuel Cywiak although not interred in a concentration camp, fought daily for survival for six years

every day of the war from 1939 to 1945. He was chased from town to town and country to country trying to survive almost starving, and one time eating raw meat (a squirrel) which was not kosher.

It is indeed about the Holocaust though since the event itself prompted the everyday life or death of this Jew, Rabbi Cywiak. In 1938 he was 19 and studying away from home to become a rabbi when he returned to Wyszkow to be with his family to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. (Rosh Hashanah began just last Monday, September 17.)

My interest in this book came from the fact that he was the Rabbi at the local synagogue, Sons of Israel in St. Augustine, FL. I have had so many friends who attend the synagogue and had heard his name mentioned numerous times, however, his flight to stay alive during the Holocaust (or this book) didn't come to my attention until a year ago. There was a fairly long article in the local paper when he was retiring at the ripe old age of 89 or maybe 90. He began his duties here in 1991.

Then when I read the acknowledgments in the sample I received on my Kindle, the first person noted was my doctor who I have been seeing for a number of years, so my interest really peeked then. He was Rabbi Cywiak's doctor as well.

Rabbi Cywiak contends throughout the book that the Holocaust was about hate. He says, "Hitler started winning support by using hate. He pointed his finger and started to blame groups that he believed caused Germany to lose the war (World War I.)"

The last paragraph of the memoir mentions hate again, "We're all followers of the same G-d, so we should all be able to get along together and be good to each other. Hatred is not what G-d teaches."*

Although Rabbi Cywiak was not in a concentration camp, he and his father when he returned home for Rosh Hashanah, were forced from their home at gunpoint and taken to the woods to stand in front of a dug pit. His father, being a very wise man and a rabbi as well, pushed his son into the pit just before the entire group of men were slaughtered and fell dead into the pit. The young man acted as though he was dead, too, and was therefore was able to 'play dead' and escape later into the woods. Surely he would have been murdered had he returned to town.

He was on the run throughout eastern Europe and Russia just avoiding slave labor and death by luck and wit. He found out later that other members of his family his mother and sister and brother were murdered in concentration camps, all but one brother who escaped death.

Rabbi Cywiak, according to my doctor, has moved to Miami to live with his family, due to his advanced age.

While this would certainly not be considered high literature, it's certainly a poignant and very readable memoir by a survivor. With millions of Jews slaughter, it was good for me to read the recollections and thoughts and feelings of one innocent man who was there at the time and had a connection to my home town.

I have always had an interest in the Holocaust and have read so little besides short articles. My question always has been how can a person or persons hate another that much that they would like to see them die? Hate them enough to spit on them, scream at them for their religious beliefs. these are questions which I could never answer. And unfortunately, hatred of others is still with us even today. A lack of understanding the religion of others is still with us today. Killing because of hatred, is still with us. Apparently we've learned nothing.

*Following Rabbi Cywiak's Jewish observant rules, writing the Sacred Name, Orthodox Jews will replace letters or syllables with other characters. For example, G-d Bless. I am following those rules in the review.

Susan says

This is very hard to review because of the nature of the writing. Many stories, information about Jews and recounting of German history are mixed in with tragic and personal recollections, primarily of the time the author spent in eastern Europe during and just before World War II.

Surprisingly he was not interred in a concentration camp and not sent to any sort of hard labor, escaping over and over from difficult situations through a seeming combination of trickery, hiding, and luck. He did lose more than half his family to Hitler's SS and only was able to reunite with two of his brothers after the war. I wish he had given more details, gone into things more instead of moving so quickly on to another development or idea, and really explained how many things came about. For example he writes that one day after an auto accident after the war, one of his brothers suddenly just walked into his hospital room. The short reason he gives for how that happened is not enough for a curious reader who truly wants to understand the story.

Although the subject is important the writer seems to be a creative person or just one with a lot of other things to say and often he is unable to stay on topic or explain in much depth. The story would be much improved if each new development did not remind him of a story, often biblical or from tradition. These extraneous stories could be a lovely addendum but as it is they detract from what could be a very moving book if it was not that the flow of the action was interrupted multiple times in each chapter.

That said, I appreciate the efforts of the author in putting his memories on paper and no one who understands the story of the Jewish people in Europe under Hitler could read any personal stories without being moved.

Note: There are many documents and photos included, giving the ring of personal detail to the book.

Rudolph Marchand says

Must read !!!

History must be learned and understood so that horrible tragedies such as the Holocaust can not be repeated. Even today many people deny that the Holocaust ever happened. This in itself is a tragedy almost as great as what happened to the Jewish people and many other ethnic groups less than a hundred years ago. It continues to this day and must be stopped. I don't have the answer, but prayer to the Creator is a start.

natalie says

I thank Goodreads for giving me the opportunity to win this book. I hesitated to enter to win this book, because I have read a lot of books about the Holocaust and didn't know if I wanted to read another. But I am

very glad I did.

Rabbi Samuel Cywiak at 90 years old has an incredible memory. His story is unimaginable, but nevertheless a very truthful story of his suffering. Somehow, all his suffering did not deter him from his wish to be a great Rabbi, and a great Rabbi he became.

At the end of this book, when Samuel Cywiak talks about what he has learned from the Holocaust, his insights are amazing to me and very thought provoking. I think everyone should read this book, Jew or Gentile, to think about our world and what it was, what it is now, and what it could become.
