



# After the War

*Carol Matas*

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"Didn't the gas ovens finish you all off?" is the response that meets Ruth Mendenberg when she returns to her village in Poland after the liberation of Buchenwald at the end of World War II. Her entire family wiped out in the Holocaust, the fifteen-year-old girl has nowhere to go. Members of the underground organization *Brichah* find her, and she joins them in their dangerous quest to smuggle illegal immigrants to Palestine. Ruth risks her life to help lead a group of children on a daring journey over half a continent and across the sea to Eretz Israel, using secret routes and forged documents -- and sheer force of will.

This adventure will touch readers, who will marvel at the resources and inner strength of mere children helping other children to find a place in this world in which they can belong. Carol Matas, one of the foremost authors of historical fiction, brings the desperation and passion of this remarkable journey to life.

## After the War Details

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Author : Carol Matas

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# From Reader Review After the War for online ebook

## Allegra S says

Where do I start with this book? This is the first book I ever read that chilled me to the bone. Even though I've read a lot of novels about the holocaust, this was one that absolutely shocked me.

When we learn about history we talk about World War II ending and then we move on to the next topic. No one talks about what happened After the War. There was still, obviously, a lot of tension and racism towards Jewish people - Germany still was not a safe place for them to live.

This story follows Ruth after she is released from a concentration camp and returns home. It details the small and large horrors such as - people being shot by the soldiers as they are leaving the camp even though the war was technically over, Ruth looking for her family from whom she was separated during the war, Ruth finding her family home has been robbed and ransacked in her absence and she has no possessions left. I think reading it as a kid from a place where all races and religions are accepted and tolerated, I was shocked that NO ONE would help this child when she was homeless and lost.

In retrospect I read this book when I was too young. The descriptions of war are horrible in their realism. Best read by older youth or adults, or together with teachers/parents.

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## Brandy Simmons says

After the War by Carol Matas is inspiring, terrifying and heartbreaking. The novel is set in Europe after WWII and chronicles Ruth's journey to Palestine. Ruth is a 15 year old survivor from Auschwitz who is all alone. Separated from her family during the war, she longs to find her family members, but assumes they are all dead. She is afraid to love or make connections with other people. Ruth's sole purpose is to survive another day. She meets Saul, a man from Palestine who is trying to help European Jews move to Palestine. Europe is still unsafe after the war. Antisemitism still thrives in Europe. Jews are randomly attacked, sometimes even murdered. Saul urges Ruth to join his movement and help bring children to Palestine. Ruth is hesitant at first, but then realizes she has "nothing better to do". Through Ruth's journey across Europe, she learns to love, to feel and to live again.

I do not typically read historical fiction, but I enjoyed this novel. I honestly never considered what the Jewish people went through after WWII. We assume the horrors of WWII ended with the war, but the novel brings to light the terror and daily struggle continued for many people. Although this is a heartbreaking tale of genocide and hate, it also is an inspiring tale of survival. Ruth is an amazing young woman. She leads these children across Europe, not only making decisions that saves all of their lives, but also taking care of the children's daily needs. Although Ruth is traumatized by the events she has witnessed, she never stops fighting for survival. I love seeing such a strong female protagonist. Novels like these are so important for young girls, especially those that are survivors of trauma. Ruth serves as an example for young girls, showing they can overcome their past. Carol Matas illustrates it is okay to learn to love, laugh and live again, however, this is a process that takes time and self-reflection. For Ruth, this meant remembering her family, talking about her trauma and allowing herself to cry. I recently lost my own mother and this novel helped me deal with my grief.

Overall, this was a great novel, which broaden my perspective of the events in Europe. Due to the violence of some of the scenes, this may be a difficult novel for some younger readers. However, I do fee the novel was very well written and was not overly gruesome.

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## **Josiah says**

"(S)omehow I've survived again. I don't know how to stop."

—Ruth, "After the War", P. 19

"(S)omething inside me feels like breaking, wants to break—but I won't let it. Too dangerous. More dangerous than running across a border with bullets at your back."

—Ruth, P. 34

I would bump the rating of this book up to four and a half stars.

I was not fully prepared for the brilliant look into the mind of a terrified holocaust survivor that is "After the War". With heartrending force and gut-twisting detail, author Carol Matas allows us a look into the tattered remains of the heart and soul of Ruth, a fifteen-year-old Jewish girl who seems to be the sole survivor from her family of the Nazi holocaust that wiped out six million innocent Jews. Ruth's spirit has folded up on itself following the horrible series of seemingly endless ordeals that she has faced so far, as she helplessly watched those she holds most dear violently die in front of her. Ruth's heart has, out of necessity, frozen itself to receiving any form of love or compassion or sympathy from those around her. It is safer that way, she realizes. When loved ones can die horrible deaths at any time and at the slightest whim of those in charge, it is too hard to allow oneself to feel anything, to become emotionally invested in any human being.

"I go in alone, for there is no one for me, but I don't care, I tell myself; I'd expected no one."

—Ruth, P. 46

"I want someone to pinch me so I can feel *something, anything*. I'm sick of this numbness, of feeling so alone and outside of everything, but I know it's too dangerous to wake up."

—Ruth, P. 49

Most readers have never experienced anything remotely like the horrific tragedies that so strongly seem to define Ruth's life after the war in this book, but the author does such a complete, masterfully sensitive job of weaving Ruth's pain around the heart and mind of the reader that it is not hard to feel the terrible agony and to understand her need to become numb. The harshest realities of the holocaust are brought into searingly sharp focus, and the result is a work of literary passion and power that will pierce the heart while expanding the scope of one's consciousness.

"Deep inside me something says don't feel anything, go back to sleep, when you feel, it hurts. When you love, people die."

—Ruth, P. 118

"Haven't we all been hurt? Don't you think it takes courage to be happy, to feel, to love? Don't you think it costs us all?"

—Rivka, "After the War", P. 121

I absolutely love the writing of Carol Matas, and this book has left a deep impression in my mind and soul. "After the War" addresses issues of pain and fear of getting hurt with such deeply resonant thrust that I think it fair to say that this story will always remain close by in my thoughts. It is a powerful sojourn that should not be missed, and I would set forth "After the War" as a premier example of superb and emotionally affecting literature. Even with so many books in print about young people during the holocaust, I would say that this book takes a rightful place among the very best.

"I am wandering inside, wandering through my past, trying to see if there is a place there strong enough to hold me."

—Ruth, P. 123

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### **Saami says**

The book "After the War", by Carol Matas, was in my opinion, an excellent read. The accuracy of the content in the book is correct. This novel displays drama and the after effect of World War 2 for the Jews. Though there were no surprises for me, I still enjoyed reading this book from beginning to end.

The story is about a girl named Ruth, who survived the holocaust. She believed that she was the only one in her family remaining. After she got taken in by an underground Jewish organization, she was given a mission to take people to "Eretz Israel"(Palestine). Her journey is basically the whole book, with the climax being the final boat trip to Palestine.

There was one twist to the story that I wasn't ready for, but like all books, the good guys always win. Reading this book was a pleasure. I recommend it to anyone who likes to read, or to anyone who wants to read about history. Seeing Jews now and seeing the way they were thinking after the holocaust is very different, from having no hope to being an equal part of the world.

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### **Hanne T says**

A really nice portraying of the Jews moving to Palestine after WWII . . . not something usually thought about. SO GOOD.

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## **Greenlee says**

This book was wonderful! I loved the storyline and the events and just the overall era of this book! I recommend this to anyone and everyone!!!!

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## **Hannah Delaughter says**

This heart wrenching book is about a girl, Ruth Mendenberg, who is only fifteen who was just released from the concentration camp of Buchenwald. This was right after World War 2 had ended. Ruth returns to her hometown in Poland to find out that no one from her family had survived neither did her house. As she was wandering around and met a man named Saul that said she needed to travel him and some of the Jewish survivors to Palestine. Along the way they were under attack and she was yet again forced to go into hiding to be able to survive. When the attack stopped, Ruth was left in charge of the orphans in helping them get to different places to keep them safe and to freedom. On the train, they meet a boy named Zvi who helped them stay safe during yet another mob attack. Along the way, they encounter more and more attacks, yet she and Zvi are always safe even after Saul died in one of the attacks. When they get to safety, Ruth isn't numb to her feelings anymore and realizes the true feelings for Zvi.

I gave this four stars because it really was a great book, but it did lose my interest at some points. I can apply this to my life, by metaphorically speaking about the trials that I have gone through with school. The attacks in this book represent the tests that I have failed to get into the teaching program, but in the end like Ruth realized her feeling and it was a glorious moment, that is when I passed the test and never gave up just like Ruth and Zvi.

I can apply this to my classroom by having my students read this book individually on their free time during class and assign chapters for homework when we talk about World War 2. When we finish the book, I would assign group research projects to look up the different type of concentration camps and they would have to present a mini presentation, (all depending on the grade.)

The Lexile for this book is 840L and the Guided reading is W. I wouldn't expect anyone to read this that is below 5th grade. This material is a little bit difficult for any young student to understand.

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## **Yvonne Crawford says**

if you like young adult books and history you will love this book

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## **Kati Polodna says**

A quick read that still had some emotional punch. Good for older middle grade and YA readers.

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## **Jacob Resnick says**

This book explores the mind of a Jewish girl in World War 2 after her family is gone a interesting a excellent way that makes you feel invested in the characters and the plot, but it is a little short.

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## Hannah says

This historical fiction book was so interesting! It's about a Jewish girl who survived WWII and all it's horrors. It tells of how she finds friends, family, and freedom. I recommend this book for ages 16+

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## Rodney says

After the war, by Carol Matas, is an eventful and interesting book to read. This book deals with the Holocaust and I am really interested in it so this book was very easy for me to read and understand. When this girl named Ruth goes home to find that her family is gone and has no idea what has happened to them, this guy finds her sitting on a curb by herself so he helps her to get away from her home town. Recently, Ruth had survived Auschwitz. Now on their journey to Palestine, they must not give their cover up so they can start over with a new life. Throughout this book, Ruth and the other Jews face challenges on survival getting to a land where they can be who they are. Will Ruth find out what happened to her family? Will she make it to Palestine? Will she start to feel again? Read this book and you'll find out. I really liked this book and I think anybody who reads it will like it.

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## Sarah says

\*Internally screaming!!!\* This book was sooo good. A must read for teens and young adults interested in history, WWII, and adventure. Little bit of romance too! <3 <3 *After the War* is a thrilling book written in a captivating way. This book fit the description of a status (that I can't find anymore) so perfectly. I loved the book, it made me think, it made me want to cry, it made me want to throw it at a wall (gently because), it made me laugh, and then I hugged it so tightly. It's actually really interesting that the author wrote in the present tense at all times (except for memories). I loved all the characters and their development so much.

This book is small (132pgs. in my edition) and I found it in the kids books section at the library, but I really don't think it's appropriate to be in the kid aisle. It's pretty descriptive of the suffering the Jews and others endured in Poland at the time of the Holocaust. I've read a couple other WWII kids books and none were so descriptive and violent as this one. But now, at my age, I appreciate learning about what the children of the holocaust went through. It's important to know this history so we, the next generation of the world, don't repeat it. There was also a bit of romance that was, in my opinion, over the top for children as well. This is, however, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults and I would highly recommend it to teens and young adults.

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## Aliyah says

Ruth Mendenberg's world was turned upside down by World War II. For years she lived in a concentration camp, enduring hideous conditions. Upon her release, she comes to believe that she is the only survivor in her entire family. She has nowhere to go, and worst of all, she is alone. Through a random encounter with a stranger, she ends up joining an organization that smuggles illegal immigrants to Palestine, and is tasked with the job of helping to lead a group of children from Poland to Palestine. The journey that ensues is one

that requires bravery and secrecy, and the weary group encounter both difficulties and joys along the way. At the core of this book though, is the story of the journey that Ruth sets out on. Not a physical journey, but a journey of the heart. The awful realities of the war are imprinted on her mind, and her heart is seemingly frozen. She's simply going through the motions – she has receded into a state of numbness. Hearing the tragic stories of so many people is hard, but it's even harder to share her own. She sometimes thaws a little and begins to show some love and affection, but as soon as the possibility of getting hurt arises, she recedes again. After the War is the story of Ruth's heart being slowly put back together, piece by piece. It's the story of her torn heart healing.

After the War was an enjoyable read. It's quite short, so can be completed in a couple of hours, depending on your reading speed.

One of the things I didn't like about it was how fast the story moved. The plot progressed really quickly, too quickly I think. More time was needed on most aspects of it, and the whole story felt choppy because of the speed. If the author had developed the characters and gone deeper into each part of the story, it would have been a lot better. Historical context and development would have been nice too. The ending was quite predictable and while it was technically a satisfactory ending, I didn't like it for various reasons that I won't mention because they would spoil it. :D

It wasn't all bad though. I liked that this book dealt with the story of someone after the war, rather than during it. We often hear only about what happened during the war, and forget that things didn't go back to 'normal' for some time. War torn countries went through long healing processes, as did war torn people. Those who survived had to heal physically, mentally, and emotionally, and that was not easy process. Through one main person, this book gave an insightful look into what the lives of so many were like during the first few years after the war.

Despite the shortcomings of this book, it was still an interesting read.  
I recommend this book for ages 12+ and give it 3 out of 5 stars.

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## **Matt D says**

After the War by Carol Matas tells the story of a group of Jewish Holocaust survivors trying to find healing and a home amid the ashes of World War 2. The protagonist, Ruth Mendenberg, feels like the Nazis took everything but her life from her; however she soon discovers she does have more to lose and that the fall of Germany has not brought with it an end to the danger her people face. Short in length but full of emotion, After the War is a book that blends the horrors faced by Jewish people in post-war Europe with the hope they held that the future could be better.

Matas writes from a combination of 1st and 3rd person. The story drives continuously with few chances for the reader to stop and catch his/her breath. Opening in the protagonist's adopted hometown, the book introduces readers to Ruth, recently released from a camp set up for Holocaust survivors. As she tries to reconnect with her past, she is found by a group attempting to relocate Jewish survivors to Palestine. The group hopes to establish a new nation of Israel so that Jews have a home and freedom from the terrors they have faced.

The story whisks its readers across Europe by train, truck, and foot. Ruth and her newfound friends hide from mobs, fight soldiers, and swim for their lives as they desperately try to reach their people's ancestral



home. Some find things they have lost and others lose everything they have in this tale of prejudice, survival, and new birth.

Ruth's character reminded me a good deal of Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*. Katniss has dealt with loss and oppression all of her life, and a good deal of *The Hunger Games* series focuses on her introspective journey. Throughout the series Katniss overcomes the scars of her past along with the new pain of her present and learns how to live despite all she has suffered. In the same way, Ruth must learn how to overcome the fear and pain of the Holocaust so she may cry, laugh, and love again. Readers have a front-row seat for Ruth's personal journey, but this does not cause the story to drag on. Matas skillfully blends Ruth's introspective story with the visible action that takes place.

This book is likely not appropriate for the youngest of YA readers. Matas pulls no punches describing both the horror of the Holocaust or the danger the Jews faced after the war. In the first 2 chapters alone, at least a dozen deaths occur around Ruth. Ruth and her friends are oppressed, beaten, and killed by people from almost every nation in Europe. This book contains death, pain, loss, and blood. Parents who are concerned about their young readers' ability to handle this type of material will likely want to read it for themselves before their children do.

*After the War* is full of action and suspense, and Matas uses these expertly to drive the story along. Ruth and her friends hide, deceive, run, swim, and fight through each chapter as they make their way to Eretz Israel. The story has the feel of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* as it seems that the whole world is against the protagonists with little to no hope their quest will be successful. Throughout the book, it seems that Ruth and her friends will never succeed. There are too many obstacles for them to overcome. I was impressed with the dogged determination Matas' protagonists displayed. Each time it seemed they would lose heart, they rallied around one another and found the strength needed to carry on.

On a personal level, I was struck by the plight of the Jewish people after World War 2 ended. I have limited knowledge of what went on in Europe at that time, but my eyes were opened to the continual struggle the Jewish people faced. If they stayed where they were, they would likely be killed. If they tried to find a new home, they would likely be jailed. The end of the war did little to improve the plight of the Jewish people. They faced oppression, hatred, and death everywhere they turned.

I recommend *After the War* for any reader interested in post-WW2 Europe. This book would also appeal to readers who enjoy stories where people overcome great difficulties. *After the War* is both gritty and endearing, an honest look at good and evil in our world. While not a true story or memoir, it is based on the stories of Holocaust survivors Matas both interviewed and read about. With the previously mentioned age concerns in mind, I would recommend this book to most if not all readers.

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