



A Red Boyhood: Growing Up Under Stalin

Anatole Konstantin

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Many children growing up in the Soviet Union before World War II knew the meaning of deprivation and dread. But for the son of an “enemy of the people,” those apprehensions were especially compounded.

When the secret police came for his father in 1938, ten-year-old Anatole Konstantin saw his family plunged into a morass of fear. His memoir of growing up in Stalinist Russia re-creates in vivid detail the daily trials of people trapped in this regime before and during the repressive years of World War II—and the equally horrific struggles of refugees after that conflict.

Evicted from their home, their property confiscated, and eventually forced to leave their town, Anatole’s family experienced the fate of millions of Soviet citizens whose loved ones fell victim to Stalin’s purges. His mother, Raya, resorted to digging peat, stacking bricks, and even bootlegging to support herself and her two children. How she managed to hold her family together in a rapidly deteriorating society—and how young Anatole survived the horrors of marginalization and war—form a story more compelling than any novel.

Looking back on those years from adulthood, Konstantin reflects on both his formal education under harsh conditions and his growing awareness of the contradictions between propaganda and reality. He tells of life in the small Ukrainian town of Khmelnik just before World War II and of how some of its citizens collaborated with the German occupation, lending new insight into the fate of Ukrainian Jews and Nazi corruption of local officials. And in recounting his experiences as a refugee, he offers a new look at everyday life in early postwar Poland and Germany, as well as one of the few firsthand accounts of life in postwar Displaced Persons camps.

A Red Boyhood takes readers inside Stalinist Russia to experience the grim realities of repression—both under a Soviet regime and German occupation. A moving story of desperate people in desperate times, it brings to life the harsh realities of the twentieth century for young and old readers alike.

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