

Podcast Transcript: Granddaughter of Immigrants

Episode Title: A Tale of Betrayal - Episode 9

Host: Erika Hanchar

Transcript

(train sounds)

[Host & Narrator: Erika Hanchar]: Rava-Ruska was a working town, ringing with the sounds of the railway and a factory that made railroad ties.

(market sounds)

Its markets were bustling with multiculturalism, and a population of around 6,500 inhabitants that were almost equally split, with 42% being Polish and 42% being Jewish, and 13% being Ukrainian.

And in the autumn of 1941, Rava-Ruska, Poland, now present-day Western Ukraine,

(sad piano music plays)

even under the veil of balance and equality, one could feel that something dark was approaching. No one could have expected what was to come, especially not the Vovk sisters.

I'm **Erika Hanchar**, and this is *Granddaughter of Immigrants*. Episode 9: A Tale of Betrayal.

(sad piano music fades out)

Mary, the eldest, was 19 years old, and Anna had just turned 16. The war was pressing on, and living in a border town between Ukraine and Poland, the sisters didn't really feel the occupation until it came knocking at their front door. Life simply went on until September of 1941, when the Nazis came looking for young, able-bodied workers. Young people working in support of the Nazi war effort was a mandate, not an option.

Anna was sure that her parents would make Mary go off to work. Surely the authorities wouldn't make two sisters leave their parents to work abroad. And she was right. Mary was well-traveled and had a job already. It made the most sense to send Mary. She could handle herself. In the letters and notes jotted down from an impromptu interview with Anna in her later years, she describes the day:

Anna: I remember when we went to the Catholic church to line up to receive our new mandatory paperwork. And it had only been a few days since the official occupation. Our local priest sat at a table in our church, giving orders like he was part of the military already. I stood in line in front of my mother, a homemaker, and my father, a well-known shopkeeper. And when our names were called, they nudged us forcibly to the table. I stood next to Mary. I was nervous

for her.

[Host & Narrator: Erika Hanchar]: The priest looked them both up and down like cattle. His gaze moved between them: Mary; older, employed, worldly; Anna; just 16, naive and sheltered. Everyone assumed Mary would be sent. But instead, the priest's finger landed on Anna. "She needs the work experience," he declared. Her parents didn't protest. He stamped her papers, and in a single sentence, her fate was sealed.

Anna: What would I be doing? I was leaving home and my family. They took me away that day.

[Host & Narrator: Erika Hanchar]: No one, especially Anna, even knew what her fate could be. At the time they were told that there were so many jobs available in Germany and Austria, and many companies in need of female workers. Most of the girls lining up were well into their 20s and 30s. Anna was the youngest of the lot. Without even a discussion, she was sent off to Austria. The job was forced labor. Slave labor. She was now part of the machine. That's the worst part. Every part, big or small, short or long, close or far away from the atrocities, helped fuel them. Not to point fingers and call out collaborators, but it's hard to not take notes on how massive and full scale these atrocities were.

Perhaps the priest really believed that she was the best for the job. Or maybe he was a Nazi collaborator who was just doing his job with a gun to his head. For her parents, they believed it was a work opportunity. She left the village of Rava that day, and unbeknownst to her parents, would be locked into years of slavery. Anna traveled for days aboard a tightly packed cattle train with other women on their way to their new "so-called" jobs. There were no stops, there were no bathrooms. Just a train car full of terrified young women just like her, who had no idea where they were going or what they would be doing.

But when she arrived in Austria, she was taken directly to a summer resort. A castle, actually, run by a Nazi officer's wife. Surrounded by mountain vistas and pristine Alpine lakes, the castle resort, placed among nature and wrapped in beauty, teetering on the edge of perfection that could have only been placed there by God himself.

Nazi Officer's Wife (German): *Du wirst die Wäsche waschen und die Betten frisch beziehen. Du sprichst nicht mit den Gästen, wenn sie hierher kommen. Du kümmerst dich um den Garten und bereitest das Gemüse zu.*

[Host & Narrator: Erika Hanchar]: Her job: make beds, wash linen, pick vegetables. And on paper, it sounds almost idyllic. But she was a prisoner. She, nor the other forced labor girls, could stop working. Barred from traveling more than 15 kilometers from the resort, which was set in the heart of the Austrian Alps—yes, the same Alps that were alive with *The Sound of Music*. It's crazy to think that even a Ukrainian slave girl picking vegetables under the guise of it being a job is in some part one of the most evil undertakings in history. It all looks so innocently... well, innocent. Regardless of how sheltered from the madness and the evils of war she was, it was still a prison nonetheless. She wasn't paid; she just got to live.

(sad piano music plays)

As Anna scrubbed linens for the Nazi officers on mini-vacations from the front, her hometown was emptied. Days after she was taken, 3,200 of Rava's Jews were marched into the forest and shot. An entire community was gone. The timing is impossible to ignore. Just as Anna was sent to work, her neighbors were sent to their deaths.

(sad piano music fades out)

It's not lost on me the extreme contrasts here. It actually makes me sick to my stomach to consider them. It's not even Anna's fault that she was taken to a beautiful place to basically be a hotel maid. As beautiful a picture as it is, the entire portrait is painted in the blood of the Holocaust victims. When I think about Anna and her story, I do think about how lucky she was, but it didn't come without absolute betrayal. Her parents gave her over without a fight. The betrayal by her family cut too deep for Anna to forgive and forget. Anna never returned to Rava, and she never saw her family again. Anna's story is not about freedom or captivity alone. It's about the blurred lines between the two. Sometimes the chains are not visible, and sometimes you can be freely working in a garden at a castle and still be a prisoner in a cage. I guess survival means you carry the chains that no one can see. And the hard part is knowing the difference.

(soft electronic music plays)

Taras Shevchenko is known to say:

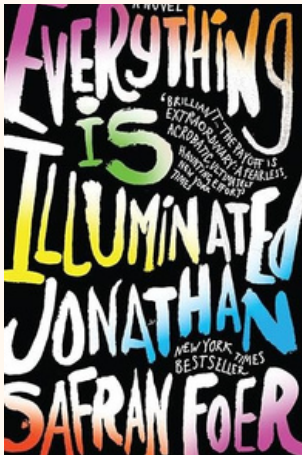
*"It's terrible to lie in chains,
To rot in dungeons deep,
But it's still worse when you are free
To sleep, and sleep, and sleep."*

This episode of *Granddaughter of Immigrants* was written by me, Erika Hanchar..

Sound engineering and design for *Granddaughter of Immigrants* by Colin Thompson and me, Erika Hanchar. Music for this episode by Ezekiel Raz, Semo and Out of Flux. For the full transcript and links to books mentioned in the episode, please see the show notes.

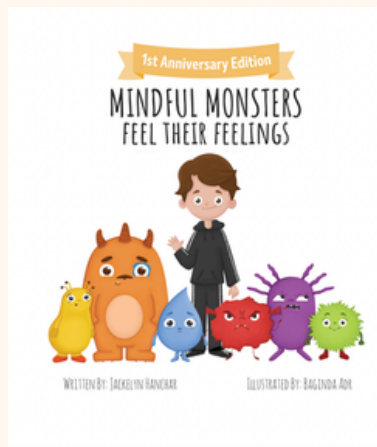
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Book RECOMMENDATIONS



EVEYTHING IS ILLUMINATED

JONATHAN SAFRAN-FOER



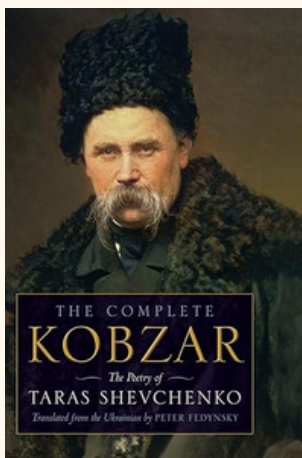
MINDFUL MONSTER FEEL THEIR FEELINGS

JACKELYN HANCHAR



THE GIFT OF THE SHIFT

ANN PAPAYOTI & TRACEY MACDONALD



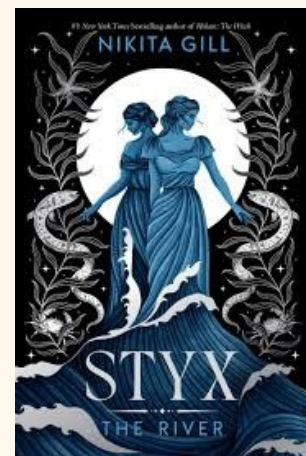
THE KOBZAR

TARAS SHEVCHENKO



SALT AND BRAIDED BREAD

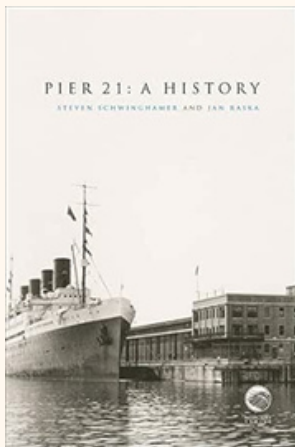
JARS BALAN



STYX : THE RIVER

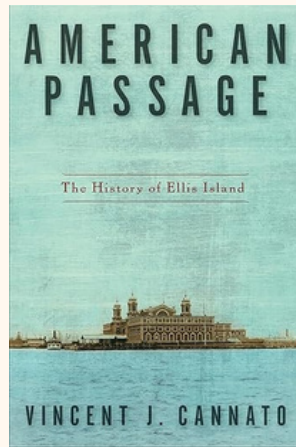
NAKITA GILL

Book RECOMMENDATIONS



PIER 21 : A HISTORY

**JAN RASKA
STEVEN SCHWINGHAMER**



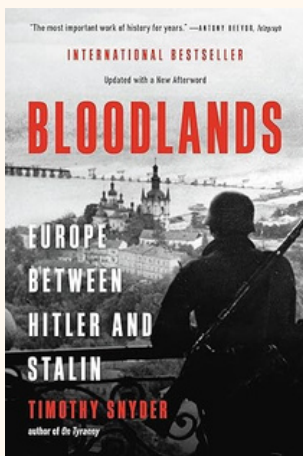
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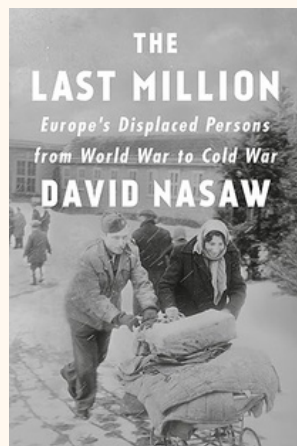
BABYN YAR

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ANATOLY KUZNETSOV**



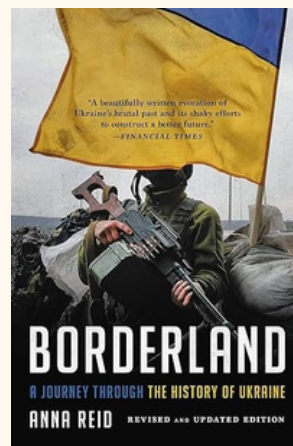
BLOODLANDS

TIMOTHY SNYDER



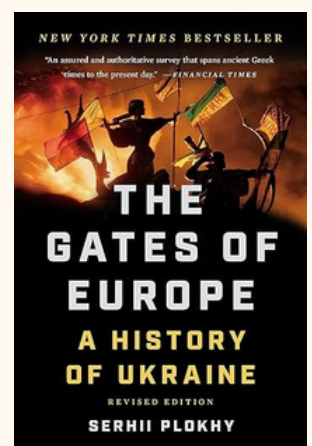
THE LAST MILLION

DAVID NASAW



BORDERLAND

ANNA REID



THE GATES OF EUROPE

SERHII PLOKHY

ABOUT ME

I'm Erika Hanchar, a **Writer, Director, Podcaster** in Ontario, Canada. I got my start in the film industry as a Stills Photographer on a **YTV children's television** production back in 2005.

In 2016, I received the Kobzar Scholarship to the **Humber School for Writers** in Toronto, and have participated in several readings at **Toronto's Arts & Letters Club** in 2018 and 2019.

In 2022, my manuscript *The Warsaw Servant* was named a finalist at the **Palm Beach International Book Festival**. More recently in early 2025, I wrote and directed a **PSA commercial** with the Women in Film & Television in Florida, USA.

My Podcast **Granddaughter of Immigrants** 2026 is a creative storytelling experience of my families immigration journey to Canada. With expert guests from **University of Alberta**. Museum Director of Shevchenko Museum in Toronto and my psychologist, who all breath history, story and clarity into the narravtive.



"(Erika) you really have your senses down, I could taste, feel, see and hear what the characters were going through. The taste of gravel was in my mouth. Honestly."

Lois Cahall on the manuscript for; *The Warsaw Servant*
Founder and Creative Director
Palm Beach Book Festival

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