

Daria's Secrets

Jeff Ingber

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Daria's Secrets is an intimate historical novel about a Holocaust survivor's rituals, relationships, and emotional reckoning with her memories.

In Jeff Ingber's novel *Daria's Secrets*, a Holocaust survivor faces her past with the help of a therapist, family members, and friends.

Daria lost her family in Poland and was sent to the Lodz ghetto. In New York after the war, she met her husband, who was also a survivor. He died when their daughter, Keren, was young. Ruthie, Daria's best friend who also survived Lodz, helped to raise Keren. Now in retirement, Daria helps with Keren's children and meets Ruthie every week. After years of delay, she decides to see a therapist to talk about her troubling dreams, panic attacks, and depression—the lifelong effects of her trauma.

Unfolding in an unpredictable manner, the book's chapters feature general points within Daria's family calendar, like her granddaughter's tennis matches, her grandson's soccer game, and holiday get-togethers. Daria discusses marriage with her daughter and dating with her granddaughter. In between these moments, she has her therapy sessions, in which current events become jumping-off points to talk about the past with clarity and vulnerability. Daria's late celebration of Yom Kippur sets her story into broad, deep context, as most of its action takes place outside of official spaces. The scene features heartfelt talks that move past previous hurts to give love the last word.

But the book's pace is meandering, losing momentum as it becomes mired in sadness and psychological analyses. Daria's mental breakthroughs are a source of vibrancy, though: with Dr. Metzger's guidance, she divulges secrets and sheds light on her inner and relational struggles. Indeed, secrets come to the surface in most episodes, resulting in a sense of intimacy. At first, this verges on voyeurism, but Daria's secrets are later calibrated as general sources of wisdom. Many revelations are tied to other's traits, like Keren's bullheadedness, Daria's daughter's love of learning, and Daria's own need to be loved. Daria's inner conflicts are further described in brief, italicized summaries of her dreams; the book's settings are made to mirror her bleak inner landscapes, which others tend to reference throughout. Astute, loving, and declarative, the cast works through their controversies to reach resolutions.

A gratifying story that works toward reconciliations, *Daria's Secrets* is a historical novel about a Holocaust survivor's intimate rituals.

MARI CARLSON (June 13, 2022)

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