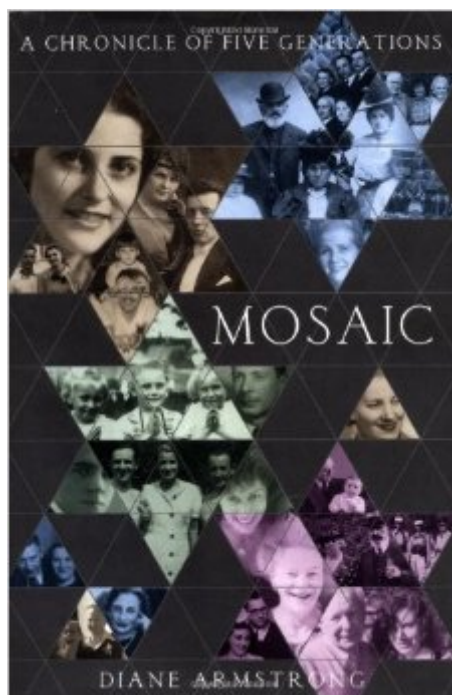


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Mosaic: A Chronicle Of Five Generations



Synopsis

Starting in Krakow, Poland in 1890, and spanning more than one hundred years, five generations, and four continents, *Mosaic* is Diane Armstrong's moving account of her remarkable, resilient family. This story begins when Daniel Baldinger divorces the wife he loves because she cannot bear children. Believing that "a man must have sons to say Kaddish for him when he dies," he marries a much younger woman, and by 1913, Daniel and his second wife Lieba have eleven children, including six sons. In this richly textured portrait, Armstrong follows the Baldinger children's lives over decades, through the terrifying years of the Holocaust, to the present. Based on oral histories and the diaries of more than a dozen men and women, *Mosaic* is an extraordinary story of a family and one woman's journey to reclaim her heritage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I absolutely loved "Mosaic: A Chronicle of 5 Generations". I have read many Holocaust memoirs & oral histories, but none have moved me as Diane Armstrong's book has. The strength of "Mosaic" is its breadth and its protagonists, the author's family. The central family, that of Daniel & Lieba Baldinger & their 11 children is augmented by cousins on the maternal side (the Spira's) as well as the family of Ms. Armstrong's mother, the Bratters. Although Poland is the setting for the first 30 years or so, as WWII beckons the scope becomes the entire continent of Europe as the now-adult children of Daniel & Lieba pursue their lives. The majority of the family is caught in Nazi-controlled Poland & thru various ruses attempts to escape being deported to the death camps. These are the most thrilling sections of "Mosaic" because Ms. Armstrong's writing is so vivid that the reader can

feel the never-ending fear that she & her family lived with for years. While she & her parents live as Catholics in a small Polish village, her aunt & young cousins are standing behind a wardrobe for days at a time in Krakow; we experience both types of anxiety as well as many others as the author recounts the many ruses various family members undertook to survive. There were family members outside of Poland during WWII as well. With 2 uncles in France, another uncle who moved his family from Belgium thru Spain to finally end in Rio de Janeiro & various aunts & cousins everywhere from Andorra to Tel Aviv the reader is treated to a kaleidoscope of war experiences. The post-war years & family diaspora is dealt with in detail also.

Many Holocaust biographies and autobiographies seem to be written by men, and the male Jewish perspective often downplays the importance of the women's characters, desires, wishes, actions, decisions, motivations, work, education, etc. You can read this book with a certain delight in noting that she does not spare her male ancestors the usual jabs at character deficiencies that most male-written books aim at the women. For example, she tries to explain at least somewhat the submissive nature of her grandmother, Lieba, Daniel's second wife, who produced the 11 children and suffered from the sheer exhaustion of it. She interviews the grown children of this couple and gets the daughters' points of view on their father, that his sex drive must have been enormous. This is not the usual comment about a male ancestor in a Holocaust novel: too judgmental. That he was also too cheap and very harsh with his children, in spite of a good income from his pipe-installation business, is a grudge brought up countless times: she does not spare the males any criticism. She makes his endless consultation with rabbis on tough questions seem silly at best, dangerous at worst - not dealing with his children appropriately; instead, obsessing with the rules of religion rather than health and well-being. These are the opening chapters of a long novel about a Polish Jewish family, their fight to survive the Holocaust after invasion of Poland, and their subsequent triumphs abroad. It's exciting reading, but permeated with a realism that an aware female descendant brought to her analysis of her own family. She openly admits that her aunts and uncles (these 11 kids) were not happy so much would be revealed about their real lives and its pettiness, cheapness, fighting and scraping.

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