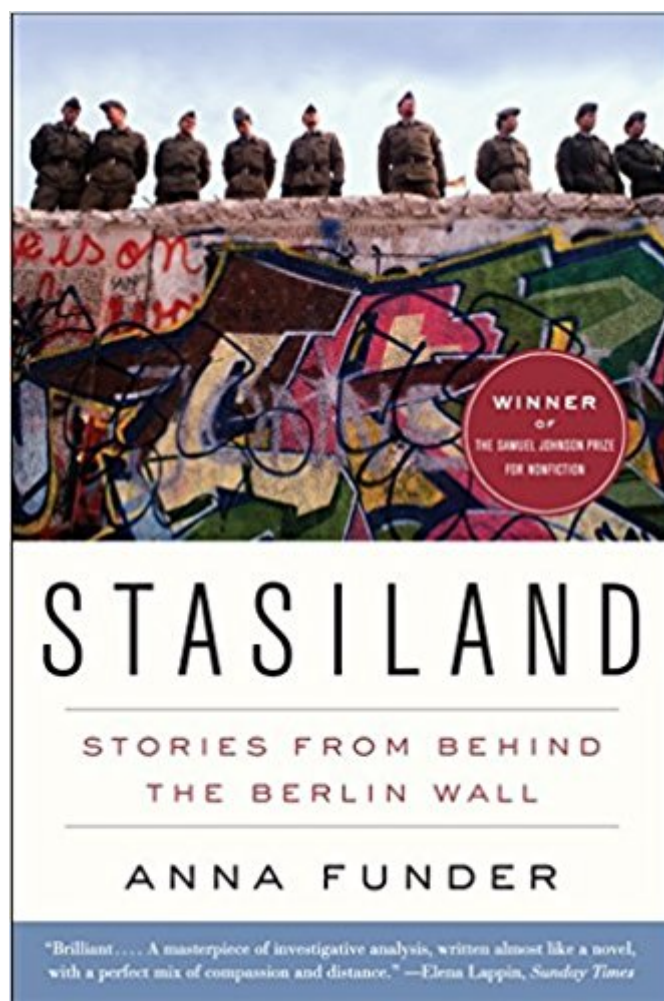


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Stasiland: Stories From Behind The Berlin Wall



Synopsis

“Stasiland demonstrates that great, original reporting is still possible. . . . A heartbreaking, beautifully written book. A classic.” —Claire Tomalin, Guardian
“Books of the Year” —Anna Funder delivers a prize-winning and powerfully rendered account of the resistance against East Germany’s communist dictatorship in these harrowing, personal tales of life behind the Iron Curtain—and, especially, of life under the iron fist of the Stasi, East Germany’s brutal state security force. In the tradition of Frederick Taylor’s The Berlin Wall and Philip Gourevitch’s We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families, Funder’s Stasiland is a masterpiece of investigative reporting, written with novelistic vividness and the compelling intensity of a universal, real-life story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Its job was to know everything about everyone, using any means it chose. It knew who your visitors were, it knew whom you telephoned, and it knew if your wife slept around." This was the fearsome Stasi, the Ministry for State Security of the late and unlamented German Democratic Republic. Funder, an Australian writer, international lawyer and TV and radio producer, visiting Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, finds herself captivated by stories of people who resisted the Stasi—moving stories that she collects in her first book, which was shortlisted for two literary awards in Australia. For instance, Miriam Weber, a slight woman with a "surprisingly big nicotine-stained voice," was placed in solitary confinement at the age of 16 for printing and distributing protest leaflets; she was caught again during a dramatic nighttime attempt to go over the Wall. Filtered through Funder’s own keen perspective, these dramatic tales highlight the courage that ordinary people can display in

torturous circumstances. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

During its 40-year history, the German Democratic Republic--East Germany--was, with Soviet assistance, the perfect police state. The organ of surveillance within the GDR (as well as foreign intelligence activities) was the Stasi, which, better than any other modern secret police, had organized a large army of citizen informers. Australian writer Funder thoroughly documents that culture of domestic spying and its effects on a cross-section of East German society. To call the stories that she relates as Orwellian is rather an understatement; the fact that they are true alone goes beyond Orwell: the mysterious death of a husband while in detention, the sudden "nonexistence" of a rock star, a mother's separation from her critically ill infant. What the reader learns from these stories is that evil swings like a pendulum, from the banal to the surreal, but no matter where it is in the spectrum, it always leaves pain behind. Frank Caso Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Former GDR citizens endured life in a dictatorship with real daily struggles, while living a double life, of not knowing what was fact, truth, false, or wrong. The GDR was openly watching its citizens via internal surveillance, by the Stasi, the East German secret police. While reading this book, I found myself releasing a long held breath from relief, sorrow, pain, confusion, sympathy and empathy. The author successfully explored, while behind the Wall, the GDR citizen needed to compromise and balance one's humanistic values, to survive the false narratives of the one party state (the Socialist Unity Party -SED), while living the reality of survival. Further, the author explored how the GDR citizen coped with the emotional toll, upon learning of how the Stasi directly or indirectly affected one's personal, professional, social, and familial life. This book has made me further believe that the human spirit does survive physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Oh, and there is humor in the book, I could not stop laughing about a plate, which reminds me - life heroes are those who can laugh and carry on.

"Stasiland" is a book that I have had on a list 'to read' for a long time. Finally, reading my Kindle edition of the book did not disappoint me. Telling her readers the stories of the events and people who, for forty years, were trapped behind the Berlin Wall, or were the perpetrators of its horrors, is gripping and holds the reader from the first page. The reader learns the stories of individuals and families who experienced the worst of a totalitarian system, but also travel with Anna into her own

thoughts and feelings as well as her struggles to discover the truth and to document it well. Anna Funder uses all her skills and determination to win the trust of ex-Stasi informers and operatives - including two highly ranked officers of the East German system. In doing so, the author reveals how unrepentant some of these characters are and how some East Germans long for the old system of communism to return. The reader learns so much about the Berlin Wall and its trip wires, dogs, guards, and alarm systems to stop people escaping to the West. And about those who were sent by the Stasi out of East Berlin because they were deemed to be more trouble than they were worth. Any reader with interest in post-WWII German history will find this book informative and emotionally engaging.

A great read. I was in Berlin about the same time as the author. When I was in the East seven years after the collapse of the Wall I could still feel the scent of oppression mixed with relief of the people to finally be free of the yoke suppressing them. Anna Funder explains this so clearly in the examples she explores.

I read this after visiting the Berlin Spy Museum piqued my interest in learning more about domestic surveillance of the DDR general population by Stasi. Looking back from 2017, the technology the Stasi used seems almost quaint compared to surveillance technology available today. The writing style is a good balance between the personal/impressionistic and impersonal/academic. The writer has done her research.

I read this book after seeing it highly rated by a friend and it didn't disappoint. I was drawn to this book about East Germany because I had just finished a book about another communist regime, North Korea. This is not a documentary book that is written like a history book. Although factually it may have been as enlightening, I would not have given it five stars on that fact alone. I really liked this book because it is first and foremost a human interest story. Yes, the content focuses on the Stasi (the East German secret police) and what they did on the East side of the wall, but the information is woven through the real stories of people who were affected in one way or another by the actions of the East German state. The book gives a face to the evils of the Stasi and more importantly to the hurt and destruction that REMAINS in the hearts of those affected. One of the facets that I enjoyed was the author's honest and realistic dealing with the topic. She struggles at times to understand, and in fact, often admits that she cannot grasp the weight of people's pain. The wall is long gone, without hardly a trace that it ever existed, but the author does an excellent job of

showing that the wall was more than physical, that it still stands in the psyche of many Germans. I also appreciated the time spent addressing the aspects of East Germany that some Germans actually miss. The fall of the Berlin wall, portrayed in the media as an event embraced and celebrated by the whole of the German people, was difficult for some to move on from, in particular those that worked as Stasi officers. Don't get me wrong, the author in no way conveys any sympathy for the former Stasi. But there were others who found themselves on the losing side of what had once been a quasi-socialist state that provided for their needs and security, although be it in an oppressive manner. A very touching and personal look at East Germany and the Stasi...

A very intense book, I found it very engaging, (at times) poignant and incredibly informative. It was an insight into a whole new world, one of which I had previously not been aware. Told without overt sentimentality, it was like a peephole into ordinary people's lives at a time in history that I can not fathom. It is not the sort of book I would normally choose but as it was compulsory school reading for Year 12, I chose to read it to see what my teenage son was up to! I think it's an excellent choice for young people to read in school as it's history that has shaped a country and a people and has had an indelible impact.

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