



After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next

By Jana Hensel

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Jana Hensel was thirteen on November 9, 1989, the night the Berlin Wall fell. In all the euphoria over German reunification, no one stopped to think what it would mean for Jana and her generation of East Germans. These were the kids of the seventies, who had grown up in the shadow of Communism with all its hokey comforts: the Young Pioneer youth groups, the cheerful Communist propaganda, and the comforting knowledge that they lived in a Germany unblemished by an ugly Nazi past and a callous capitalist future.

Suddenly everything was gone. East Germany disappeared, swallowed up by the West, and in its place was everything Jana and her friends had coveted for so long: designer clothes, pop CDs, Hollywood movies, supermarkets, magazines. They snapped up every possible Western product and mannerism. They changed the way they talked, the way they walked, what they read, where they went. They cut off from their parents. They took English lessons, and opened bank accounts. Fifteen years later, they all have the right haircuts and drive the right cars, but who are they? Where are they going?

In *After the Wall*, Jana Hensel tells the story of her confused generation of East Germans, who were forced to abandon their past and feel their way through a foreign landscape to an uncertain future. Now as they look back, they wonder whether the oppressive, yet comforting life of their childhood wasn't so bad after all.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hensel was born in Leipzig, East Germany, in 1976 and was 13 when the Berlin Wall fell. This intriguing but frustrating memoir, a bestseller in Germany, portrays the disorientation of her generation, whose upbringing under communism ended abruptly with the integration of East and West Germany. Hensel rambles through a wide range of subjects: the erasure of memory; East German youth's alienation from their Western peers; her ambivalence about her childhood; their inability to adjust to the new world, which resulted in a role reversal in which Hensel had to "interpret" Western customs for her parents; and her generation's compulsion to disguise themselves as Western, changing their clothes and even their accents. But the disappearance of the artifacts of her childhood and the lack of value attributed by her Western friends to her memories leave Hensel at a loss. According to Clarke's note at the book's end, this was the first title to expose the experience of Hensel's generation. Although the memoir clearly struck a chord in Germany, it is so blurred by the "twilight zone" of Hensel's existence, "in which daily life seems arbitrary, provisional, and somewhat unreal," that Clarke's thoughts more clearly reveal East German history and Hensel's generation than the author does herself.

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From Booklist

A best-seller in Germany under the title *Zonenkinder*, Hensel's memoir is one of the first from her generation to examine the cultural effects of communism's fall in East Germany. When the Berlin Wall came down, Hensel was only 13 years old, and her high-school class was the first to follow a West German curriculum. Hensel writes refreshingly unaffected personal anecdotes about growing up behind the iron curtain and, postcommunism, about how she and her young adult peers strove to assimilate in the West--losing accents and clothing styles--anything that would betray which side of the wall they grew up on. With candor, deep insight, and occasional bursts of acid wit, Hensel describes the bewildering divides between older generations of East Germans and her own. And in deeply moving observations, she shows how the universal ache of leaving childhood behind was, for her, even more profoundly disorienting because an entire culture, not just a childhood, had been lost. A fascinating, highly readable memoir that should interest a wide audience. *Gillian Engberg*

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Review

"Publishing News"

"Thirteen when the Berlin Wall came down, Hensel describes what it was like for her generation, growing up with the certainties and strange comforts of a totalitarian regime which was suddenly swept away. Her memoir is of a childhood suddenly truncated, life changed forever as she and many like her try to absorb all the experiences they had missed, behind the wall."

"The International Herald Tribune"

"[Jana Hensel] shines a fascinating light on the social and emotional consequences as the euphoria dissipated and was slowly replaced by a sense of disenfranchisement, disorientation and confusion... Surprisingly for someone who makes her living as a journalist... her prose is simple and at times almost guileless. Yet far from detracting from her story, this quality actually enhances the honesty and integrity that runs through her fascinating narration of a changing world."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Allan Nguyen:

Now a day individuals who Living in the era just where everything reachable by talk with the internet and the resources included can be true or not need people to be aware of each data they get. How individuals to be smart in having any information nowadays? Of course the reply is reading a book. Looking at a book can help persons out of this uncertainty Information specially this After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next book as this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred % guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Dennis Bloom:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition info. Even you love After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next, you are able to enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still would like to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh occur its mind hangout men. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its called reading friends.

Thanh Johnson:

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Lester Gibbons:

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