

A LIFE FROM THE ASHES

MARIKA



Paul D. Ellner



Marika is the fictionalized biography of a remarkable woman. Orphaned in Hungary during the Holocaust, she endures starvation and poisoning while carrying forged documents to Jews who escape from trains bound for death camps, and faces impending execution by Hungarian Nazis. Immigrating to the United States, she completes college and becomes a recognized child psychologist and a professor at Harvard. Her life is marred by hurtful marriages but she finds happiness with a childhood lover.

Marika

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Like every Jew in Budapest, Marika was afraid to be on the street. Between air raids, a Jew constantly risked capture by Germans or Arrow Cross members. Marika sometimes stayed at Laszlo's apartment when she was unable to return home. His apartment was not far from her school.

On her way home from school one day, Marika heard the first air raid warning siren in the distance. She quickened her pace. Moments later, another siren screamed. This one sounded much closer, and she started to run. *I've got to get home so Papa and I can get into the shelter.* In just a few minutes, Russian Mig fighter planes dove on the city, releasing their bombs. As she ran, the explosions seemed to come nearer. Marika was fourteen, and she was frightened. She arrived home, out of breath, and ran inside to find her father waiting for her.

"Hurry, Papa," she gasped. "We have to get to the shelter." They arrived at the shelter to see the door slam shut.

"We're too late, Marika," her father said. "Let's go home."

They returned home to find it was completely dark. There was no power, but they were able to make their way into the house. They huddled on the floor in the dark. The explosions

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sounded closer, and the building shook with each blast. From the window, Marika could see searchlights probing the sky for enemy aircraft and could hear the thump-thump of anti-aircraft batteries. The Nazis bombed European cities without regard to civilian casualties, and the Allies soon responded in kind.

Marika's father had been holding her hand, but now he gasped and clutched his chest.

"What's the matter, Papa?" Marika whispered.

"My chest—pain—I can hardly breathe."

"Oh, Papa."

"I think it's my heart," he said.

Marika trembled with fear. *Don't die, Papa—please don't leave me.*

She cried and started to recite the prayers that Nana had taught her—Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be—the only ones she knew.

"I'll call the doctor right now, Papa. Don't worry," she managed to say.

The bombing continued. Marika knew the doctor's phone number and dialed it. The phone rang for a long time before the doctor answered.

"Doctor! It's Marika—Marika Eiber. My father might be having a heart attack. Please come right away!"

"I can't come, Marika", the doctor said. "It's much too dangerous. Besides, my family is locked in the shelter, and I need to be there when the all-clear sounds."

"But doctor. . ." Marika said, but the line was dead.

Marika went back to her father. He lay on his back, one hand still on his chest. He tried to wipe his forehead. Marika touched him and found his face covered with cold sweat. She

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sat down next to him and cradled his head in her lap, holding him in her arms, and rocking back and forth. She used the hem of her dress to wipe the sweat from his face.

The hours dragged. Eventually the bombing stopped, and the all clear sounded. Marika could hear people running out into the street. Some were crying, and others called to locate family members. Her father's face was ashen, and she realized that he had stopped breathing.

"No, Papa! Oh, no Papa," she moaned. *What will I do—I'm so frightened—first Mama—now Papa—who'll take care of me—look after me?* Marika laid her face on his chest and wept. She continued to sob as dawn suffused the sky.



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