



## **Lily Renée, Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer**

*Trina Robbins, Anne Timmons, Mo Oh*

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In 1938, Lily Renée Wilhelm, a 14-year-old Jewish girl, is living in Vienna when the Nazis march into Austria. After a ship voyage fraught with danger from Nazi torpedoes, teenage Lily reunites with her parents in New York and helps her family earn a living by painting designs on wooden boxes. One day she sees an ad in the paper: a comics publisher is looking for artists. Lily has never drawn comics before, but teaches herself how they work. She is hired to draw the character Senorita Rio, a beautiful spy fighting the Nazis.

## **Lily Renee, Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer Details**

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## **From Reader Review Lily Renee, Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer for online ebook**

### **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

The story of Lily Renee is one of triumph over adversity. One of the only female comic artists of the Golden Age her contribution to comics is long overdue, but now it is told.

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### **Sharon says**

Definitely for a young audience, this graphic biography focuses on the artist's flight from Nazis, not her comics career. Nicely told.

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### **Sesana says**

I was hoping to like this one better than I ended up. I'm in love with the idea: a Jewish girl who escapes Nazi-occupied Austria and ends up a successful comics artist in America. I would have liked it much more if it had been longer. At this length, there's no real room for Lily Renee's career. That's a shame. I do like it for including the Kindertransport, something that I haven't seen mentioned much in Holocaust related literature. What of Lily's story that is actually here is very good, I just wish there'd been more of her later life.

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### **Yuko86 says**

English review (for italian version scroll down)

Lily Renee is a lucky child: she has a family who loves her and she is very good at painting. But then the Holocaust begins and all changes: in fact, Lily is jewish, her only way to survive is to escape from Austria to England, alone and without money, as a guest in the family of one of her penfriend. But in her new home she is treated as a servant and left without anything to eat. So she has to escape again, but it won't be the last time: she'll travel through different cities, meeting many people, until she'll find her place in the world, becoming a comic book pioneer.

The story is interesting and I think it's a very good means for children to know and learn something about holocaust and the second world war.

For older readers, it's really to short! All the events are so fast-paced that you haven't got the time to really get into the story: I'd have preferred to read more about Lily's life in America and how she became such an important artist. In addiction to that, all seems too easy compared to the true reality of the holocaust.

The drawings are really beautiful and well made, and I appreciated a lot the insights at the end of the graphic novel.

Italian review:

Non avevo mai sentito nominare Lily Renée Wilheim prima di leggere questa graphic novel e mi ha fatto piacere scoprire qualcosa della sua vita e di come, nonostante le avversità, sia riuscita a costruirsi un brillante futuro. La storia ripercorre una triste parentesi del nostro passato, raccontandola dal punto di vista di una ragazzina: alcuni degli eventi principali di quegli anni sono rapidamente descritti, come la notte dei cristalli, l'accordo con il governo inglese per l'invio di bambini, i bombardamenti su Londra. Per un ragazzino che si avvicina per la prima volta a certi avvenimenti, può essere una lettura davvero educativa, sia dal punto di vista storico che da quello morale.

Quando il lettore è un po' più adulto, avverte invece un' eccessiva rapidità dello svolgersi dei fatti: le cose vengono solo accennate, sembra sempre che Renée passi da un posto all'altro in un battito di ciglia, lasciando dei buchi narrativi. E ciò porta, secondo me, a un altro difetto: la mancanza di sentimento. Scorre tutto in modo tanto rapido che non si fa in tempo a entrare in empatia con la piccola, a dispiacersi per lei: il tutto rimane molto asettico ed è un grande peccato, vista comunque la tragicità di certi avvenimenti. Probabilmente la storia è stata resa in questo modo per renderla più "digeribile" per il giovane pubblico: per quel che mi riguarda, erano meravigliose le premesse, la realizzazione però non le sfrutta appieno. Per quel che concerne il lato puramente grafico, ho apprezzato molto i disegni, semplici e puliti. Molto interessanti gli approfondimenti presenti nelle ultime pagine.

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In conclusion, an educative and interesting story for younger readers.

### **Nick says**

Really only 3 1/2 stars, but I rounded up for the cool subject matter. A woman who avoided the concentration camps before eventually becoming an artist in the U.S. during the Golden Age of comics...how could that not be a great story!

My only serious complaint about this book is that it covered so little of her career as an artist. As a graphic biography of her early life, though, I found it to be interesting. I'm not certain that kids will find it as appealing. The difficult part will be to get them to read a book about someone they've never heard of. It will be easier for readers who have already read a bit about World War II or the plight of the Jews during that period. Putting the story into context with a very different viewpoint of life during the Blitz in England was interesting as well.

As a longtime comics fan. I was unfamiliar with her work, although I had read a couple of Golden Age comics from the company she worked for. Her story, including her escape from Austria after the Nazi takeover, were very interesting. Once she got to England, though, the story slows down quite a bit, as it goes into more obscure parts of World War II history and life.

I would recommend this to kids and teens who have read the story of Anne Frank and who want other stories from that period.

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### **Dichotomy Girl says**

2.5 Stars...deducted .5 Star for the crazy abrupt ending..

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## Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

It seems only natural that the biography of a comic book artist should be told in a graphic book. Lily Renée Wilhelms was the 14 year old daughter of well to do Jewish parents in 1938 Vienna, Austria. The family had many friends in Vienna, but when Austria became part of Germany that year, they lost not just their friends, but eventually everything they owned.

In 1939, Lily was invited to by her English pen pal to come live with them. She became part of the Kindertransport before it ended in September 1939. England should have been a refuge for Lily, but her pen pal's mother turned out to be a rather cruel woman who expected her to do all the housework and shopping. She also neglected to feed her during the day, so Lily was forced to live only on high tea in the evening.

Eventually she ran away and took work as a mother's helper for various doctor's families. But in 1940, England considered people of German and Austrian descent to be Enemy Aliens and they were placed in internment camps. Again, Lily was forced to run away, to London, where she is encouraged to turn herself in to the police. Because she is still a minor, Lily is again placed on another Kindertransport, this time to the United States.

Sadly, up until now, she had no idea what had become of her parents, but she is told that her parents are in now New York, so when her ship docked, the family is finally reunited.

Away from the war and the Nazis, the Wilhelms family begins to adjust to living in New York City. Lily works as an artist for catalogues, but soon her mother encourages her to apply for a job at Fiction House Comics. From there she worked her way up, from eraser to penciling a character named Jane Martin, to getting her own character, Senorita Rio.

As a long time lover of comic books, I thought this graphic memoir was quite well done. The story of Lily's life was clearly presented, and there were short but thorough explanations of some of the events that impacted the lives of her and her parents. My only problem was the timeline. Sometimes, I felt I was led to think some of Lily's experiences lasted longer than they turned out to be.

At the end of the book is section called 'More about Lily's Story.' This includes a short glossary of German to English terms that are used, followed by a section that gives the reader broader explanations of many of the different things in Lily's world that they might not be familiar with, ranging from such topics as the difference between Nazi Concentration Camps and British Internment Camps to a description of the Automat, an inexpensive eatery that no longer exists.

The artwork in *Lily Renée, Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer* is excellent. The drawings are clearly and cohesively done, portraying the events that impacted the Wilhelms family, as well as their reactions. The colors are vivid and somehow seem so appropriate for the period this memoir covers.

The author, Trina Robbins, is herself a comic book artist, one of the founders of the all-women's comic book 'Wimmen's Comix.' She is also a writer and historian of feminist pop culture. She is a co-founder of Friends of Lulu (of Little Lulu fame, my favorite comic book), which is dedicated to women and comics.

On the whole, I think that *Lily Renée, Escape Artist : From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer* would be an excellent story for middle grade readers who are curious or are learning about the Holocaust, and I would recommend this graphic biography to anyone with an interest.

This book is recommended for readers age 9-12.

The book was received as an E-ARC from Netgalley.com. It will be released on 11/1/2011.

More information about Lily Renée may be found at [Woman in Comics](#)

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### **Mrs. Porter says**

Autobiographical account of one girl's experience during the Holocaust and her life after the War.

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### **Tjoganich7 says**

Lily Renée is living a happy, normal life (as a Jew) and wants to keep it that way, but then the Nazis (Hitler's army) attack their home, Vienna, on March 12, 1938. So, Lily's parents sent her to stay with Lily's pen pal in England, Molly; Lily's parents told her to look for jobs in England, so her parents didn't have to live in the invasion. Then Lily did not like living in with Molly and her family, so Lily searched for her cousin Greta, but on her way she had some jobs. Later she reached America and found her parents; soon after Lily became a comic book artist.

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### **Jo says**

3.5 Stars.

It would have been practically impossible to write one of my usual reviews on this wonderful graphic novel from Trina Robbins because it is *so* short.

I had drawn and coloured in (within the lines, too!) a sprawling and epic graphic review of this novel and it was spectacular but just as I was about to scan in my masterpiece onto my computer.... It, um, broke.

\*cough\*

So yeah, you'll have to make do with this bog-standard review.

This graphic novel follows the story of Lily Renée Wilhelm, an Austrian girl who was sixteen when the Nazis forced her family to uproot and move to Vienna. After witnessing the horrifying and brutal acts that took place in this period (Especially the mention of Kristallnacht, an event that I learnt about in my history GCSE but never read any books that depicted it!), Lily is sent to England in a short-lived scheme set up by Germany to protect the children from the inevitable war.

Before I started this book I knew nothing about Lily's life and I found her story of surviving against the odds to become a hugely successful comic book illustrator fascinating. But I couldn't help but feel like this book was a ridiculously fast-paced and rushed in some parts.

I would have loved to have read more about Lily's time in England and for Ms Robbins to have explored the complex feelings that the British undoubtedly felt towards Lily (along with the other Austrian/German

children who were evacuated) while their cities were being ravaged by German bombers. Also, I think the story would have benefitted from a bit more detail on what happened to Lily when she landed on America and how she became to be a noted illustrator. There were a lot of gaps that could have been filled in by just adding a few more pages, just to clear things up and make the transitions feel less hurried as they did.

It's no secret that I'm a huge fan of graphic novels and the aesthetics of this book did not disappoint me. It is blatant that Ms Robbins is a master illustrator and knows exactly what she is doing when it comes to creating affective and beautiful drawings. The vivid and lavish colours of the illustrations really complimented Lily's fascinating story and the tragic history of the period.

After a few hours snooping on the Internet, I feel it is well worth researching the life of Lily Renee Philips. Her life is a fascinating and remarkable story and one that I feel should be much more widely known about.

*I received a copy of this book from the publishers.*

You can read the review for this book, others and plenty more exciting stuff at my blog [here](#).

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### **Elise says**

Lily Renee, Escape Artist is a historical non-fiction graphic novel written by Trina Robbins that follows the life of Lily Renee Wilheim from hardships to success. The story begins when Lily is 14 and living a grand life in Vienna of going to the ballet, opera, and creating her own artwork. However, this lifestyle quickly changes when Nazi Germany invaded Austria in 1938. As the threat of danger began to heighten in Austria for the Jewish people, Lily was given the opportunity to move to England and live with her pen pal. Even after escaping the Nazis, Lily's life in England was filled with hardships as she was put into servitude by the family she was staying with, she had to work to stay alive, and the dangers of war were upon her. Just as all hope fading for Lily, she got a letter from her parents that they were safe in America and for her to join them. Upon arriving in America, Lily's life turned around for the better as she pursued her art career.

I have always been very interested in the Holocaust and World War II, so this book immediately caught my eye in the library. Just as I had hoped, this graphic novel does an excellent job telling the story of Lily Renee and giving the reader insight into the hardships and realities of being a Jewish in a Nazi dominated land. The author, Trina Roberts, along with the illustrators Anne Timmons and Mo Oh, collaborate on the text and graphics to ensure that the pictures enhance the text and add to the story. The pictures throughout the story allow the reader to visualize and connect with the hardships Lily is facing and add emotion to the text being read. When the text talks about the stone cold faces of the soldiers or the fear of the Jews, the pictures do a great job illustrating the emotion so the reader is able to distinctly see emotions of fear, anger, etc. This story is also very easy and straightforward to read even though it is in a different format. The word bubbles are used for the characters talking and speaking, where the squares are used to provide information. This technique makes this story easy to follow and accessible for younger ages to read and learn about the history. As this book is the first graphic novel I have ever read, I would recommend it to any reader because it accurately provides historical information and the pictures do a great job to accompany the text to enhance meaning, leaving a great first impression of graphic novels on me.

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### **Kathy says**

I would recommend this book for students studying the holocaust. Especially for students who are at a lower

reading level. It is well paced and easy to understand.

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### **Sharon Erickson says**

From my 11 year old: "I love graphic novels. This book warms your heart. This book follows Lily as she lives through the Holocaust. There are many sad parts, but I would still recommend this book."

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### **Deb Tyo says**

Good story!

I think MG kids will like this true story of a young girl who escapes Austria during World War II. Lily Renee faces many hardships after leaving her home.

Told in a graphic novel format, readers will learn about World War II, about Jews in Austria, about Kindertransport, "enemy aliens", and early comic book history.

A section at the end of the book called 'More About Lily's Story' gives easy-reading factual information about topics in the book.

Lots of information here packed into a nonthreatening read.

From the back of the book: "In 1938, Lily Renee Wilheim is a 14-year-old Jewish girl living in Vienna. Her days are filled with art and ballet. Then the Nazis march into Austria, and Lily's life is shattered overnight. Suddenly, her own country is no longer safe for her or her family. To survive, Lily leaves her parents behind and travels alone to England.

"Escaping the Nazis is only the start of Lily's journey. She must escape many more times--from servitude, hardship, and danger. Will she find a way to have her own sort of revenge on the Nazis? Follow the story of a brave girl who became an artist of heroes and a true pioneer in comic books."

(Read for the IRA Teachers' Choices Project)

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### **An Abundance of Books says**

Featured at An Abundance of Books

Lily Renee, Escape Artist is divided into eight chapters based on significant times in Lily's life. The book also includes a glossary and additional information on some of the different events mentioned. There is also a two page spread of Lily's personal photographs which is a very nice touch. Robbins has an awesome story to work with, but I think the story suffered under page number constraints and unnecessary simplification for the target audience.

Lily grew up in a wealthy Austrian family and the Nazis did completely change her life. The Nazi party stole

from them, limited their freedoms, took her father's job, their friends and neighbors turned on the family, and Jewish refugees from across Austria were crammed into the Wilheim home by the Nazis. (Apparently this happened to all Jewish families who lived in Vienna.) This part of the story was pretty well written and age appropriate. the Kindertransport chapter was also very good but got tripped up towards the end. The chapter on Lily's experiences in England was very interesting. While many children didn't speak English, some, like Lily, had studied it in school and had assumed they would have no problems communicating. Unfortunately, speaking with the British was a lot different from speaking with a teacher who spoke slowly and used textbook English. Robbins did a good job of showing that the children not only had to deal with a new language but also different customs, currency, and culture. At one point Lily is classified as an "enemy alien" and has to report to a police station every week. Just when she finds out her parents are alive and she can join them in New York, the British government starts sending enemy aliens to internment camps. There was a jumble of events where she goes into hiding, but then turns herself into the police, spends the night in jail, is released by a friendly stranger, and makes it to the boat on time. While there was some really interesting information in here and it's a very scary time for Lily, this section of the story was just not told very well. Too many events were glossed over or never fully explained. It felt like story was being shortchanged in an attempt to maintain momentum and keep the story accessible to it's audience. There are parts where I know a younger reader is going to go to an adult and say, "I don't understand, what just happened?" But it will be evident to kids that Lily lived through difficult times and I think they will appreciate her refusal to give up.

Once Lily is reunited with her parents life is still hard but the narrative flows a bit more smoothly. It's really neat how Lily stumbled into to comic book work (the pay was too good to pass up) and eventually was in charge of her own books. Most of her characters were strong women, excelling in a man's world, and helping to defeat the Nazis. The only thing that disappoints me about this section is that it's never mentioned how hard Lily had to work and fight to keep that job. She put up with a lot of sexual harassment and cried herself to sleep at night. Now I realize that this might be challenging to explain in a universally appropriate manner to the late elementary/middle grades audience, but I'm sure something could have been added to explain that Lily didn't just work hard to move up in the ranks but also fought against a hostile work environment.

Lily Renee's story is a fascinating one and one that I think kids will enjoy. But because of some of the problems with the narrative I don't think it's worth purchasing. If it sounds like something that might interest your child, I would suggest picking this one up from the library and be prepared to explain some things. I give it three stars because I think it's a story that kids will be interested in and ultimately like, but they'll have to put some effort into it.

Read full review [HERE](#)

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