



Becoming Alice: A Memoir

Alice Rene

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Six-year-old Ilse watches Nazi soldiers march down her street in Vienna. She does not understand the threat to her Jewish family nor the harrowing escape that follows which will bring her to Riga, Latvia, through Russia and Japan, over the Pacific Ocean, and finally end in Portland, Oregon. Although the family is safe at last, author *Alice Rene* tells us in this book about the emotional impact of Nazi tyranny on a young child, just how it effected her personally.

Ilse is ashamed of herself for being different and becomes anxious and withdrawn. The antics of an outrageous aunt and uncle, though comical, only add to her humiliation. Changing her name to Alice does not alter her feelings of isolation. She realizes that she must somehow make peace with her history and identity. With both pathos and humor, *Becoming Alice* showcases Alice's triumph over adversity, identity crisis and the sometimes debilitating power of family ties.

Becoming Alice: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review *Becoming Alice: A Memoir* for online ebook

Claudia Moscovici says

Hailed as "a deftly written memoir that will hold the reader's attention from beginning to end" by the Midwest Book Review and described as "a magnificent memoir and an impressive, courageous piece of work" by Writers Digest Magazine, Alice Rene's *Becoming Alice: A Memoir* deserves every word of praise it got...and more. The memoir begins with a description of the Anschluss, when Hitler annexed Austria to the Third Reich in 1938. *Becoming Alice* describes the impact of these tragic historical events upon Austria's Jewish population from the perspective of a six year old girl named Isle.

Isle and her family watch helplessly as the Nazi soldiers march down their street in Vienna. Faced with discrimination and the threat of deportation, they're obliged to flee Austria for fear of worse. Taking only their most basic belongings, Isle and her father, mother and older brother Fredi risk a difficult journey through Stalinist Russia, at war with Germany, to eventually make their way to Portland, Oregon. The memoir reflects historical fact, but it's as well written as the best of novels. In fact, *Becoming Alice* is reminiscent in subject and narrative voice of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Alice Rene's autobiographical narrative skillfully captures the girl's limited and innocent perspective as she lives through one of the most inhumane and incomprehensible moments in human history. While Isle and her family are quite fortunate to have escaped the Holocaust, finding themselves as new immigrants in the U.S. is no easy matter either. As Isle adapts to the new culture and craves acceptance and assimilation, she becomes increasingly critical of her family dynamics: particularly of the interaction between her overbearing father and submissive--yet also, in some respects, incredibly strong and resilient--mother. By the end of the narrative, when she's already in her teens, Isle succeeds in Americanizing not only her name--which she changes to Alice--but also her whole identity and outlook. She doesn't forget, however, her original culture, nor the historical calamity that brought her family to the U.S. This is a riveting story : a memoir that reads like a novel about a moment in history that we should never forget.

Claudia Moscovici, Notablewriters.com

Stephanie Kerr says

Ilse was a six year old Jewish girl in Austria. She didn't understand why her parents were so scared or why they had to move to America. *Becoming Alice* is the story of her struggle to be accepted in a very difficult time in history.

I don't usually read memoirs or autobiographies but I received this book free through Goodreads First Reads. This was a pretty good book. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in learning about Jews lives during WWII. My favorite thing about this book was the pictures of Alice and her family and friends. That really brought the story to life for me. It's hard to imagine that this, and much worse, actually happened to people during WWII.

Anna says

Becoming Alice is Alice Rene's memoir about fleeing Europe in the early days of World War II and her family's struggle to succeed in America. Things aren't easy for the Fells when they arrive in Portland. Ilse — who later chooses the name Alice when she becomes a U.S. citizen — enters third grade without knowing any English or having ever set foot in a classroom. While her parents are learning how to run a grocery store — her father isn't allowed to practice medicine right away — Alice is trying to find herself and make friends.

Rene's memoir is a page-turner. Opening with the tension and the fear of the Nazi invasion and all the hoops her family must jump through to leave Europe, I didn't want to put the book down. It's almost as if Rene has stepped back in time, back into the shoes of little Ilse. Rene tells the story from her little-girl point of view, re-living the memories, rather than simply recounting them in hindsight. Once in America, the book becomes both an immigrant story and a coming-of-age story, and Rene does a wonderful job of showing how she and her parents overcame their initial struggles. I like that she doesn't romanticize her story and portrays her parents as real people with flaws; she remembers her father's temper, his need to feel as though he is better than everyone else and always right. I think that we can all relate to Alice on some level in butting heads with our parents when they want us to do one thing but we want to do another.

My only complaint is that the book ends too soon, and the epilogue doesn't make mention of all the family and friends who play a big role in Alice's story. I wonder what happened to them all. I'm really picky about memoirs, so for me to wish that it had been longer is saying a lot.

Full review on [Diary of an Eccentric](#).

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Katie Hayes for TeensReadToo.com

Born with the name Ilse, Alice Rene was six when the Nazis took over her hometown of Vienna, Austria.

Her Jewish family was forced to flee, and while many others, including some of her family members, weren't so lucky, Ilse and her parents and older brother eventually settle in Portland, Oregon.

From there, Alice documents her life in America: learning English, her struggles making friends at school, becoming an American citizen. She changes her name from Ilse to Alice and starts calling her parents "Mom" and "Dad" instead of "Mama" and "Papa."

As she gets older, Alice experiences her first romance and watches her older brother go through the pain of heartbreak. She also gains the courage to stand up to her overbearing father for the first time. When high school ends and she starts applying to college, Alice begins to plan ways to forge her own identity apart from her family.

This is an interesting memoir that reads more as a series of chronological anecdotes than a straightforward narrative. While the effects of the Holocaust are an inescapable part of the novel, the focus is more on Alice's experiences becoming American and establishing her own identity.

I would recommend BECOMING ALICE as an interesting coming-of-age memoir.

Angela Simmons says

In "Becoming Alice, A Memoir", we are introduced to the Fell family through the eyes of their daughter Ilse, who was only six years old when the Nazi soldier's changed her life forever. As she watched them marching down the street she could never have imagined the destruction and devastation that they would leave in their path. Barely able to stay ahead of the invading army the Fell family flees from their home in Vienna, Austria. First they go to Riga, then to Latvia and finally to the safety of America. Arriving in Portland, Oregon they were unaware of the hardships they were about to face living in a world they were not acquainted with. Each and everyday became a struggle for this once prominent family, no longer could they live the life that accustomed to. Soon Ilse childhood became marred by the events that fell upon her family, never knowing where she fit in and trying to adjust to this strange land. Trying to make the best of every situation became hard as she went from Ilse to Illy to Elsie and even Sally before she finally became Alice. When she became Alice she finally began to become comfortable in her own skin.

"Becoming Alice, a Memoir", is a moving narrative that will touch your heart and stir your soul. Wrote as though she is telling you personally the story of her life, Alice Rene, moves you to tears and then cheers you up as she brings you the highs and the lows of her life. Alice Rene has no only written her memoirs she has written a book that will inspire all of us rise above what is holding you down. Truly a book that all should read. I considered it an honor to review her wonderful book.

Jen Knox says

A poignant work, full of delicate insight and consuming language. This is a journey story, a girl's coming-of-age, and a careful investigation of family. Becoming Alice traces one family's struggles, leaving Nazi-occupied Vienna and arriving in America, where trauma begins to surface. I found this book engaging from beginning to end.

Darcy Odden says

"Becoming Alice: A Memoir" is a first-person account by Alice Rene of her family's escape from the Nazis to America. The family lived in Vienna, Austria, where her father was a doctor. Alice was known as Ilse and her older brother was named Fredi. When the Nazis began to take over Vienna, the family was forced to stay out of sight. Alice's father couldn't work because he was Jewish. The family's bank account was frozen, as were all Jewish bank accounts. Because circumstances became too dangerous in Vienna, the family fled to Memel, Germany, then to Riga, Latvia. Visas were hard to come by, so when one was finally available to the family, Fredi was sent to New York. The rest of the family remained in Riga until they received visas for travel on the Trans Siberian Railway, ending in Kobe, Japan. Then they endured a typhoon on their boat ride to Seattle, Washington.

Upon arriving in America and reuniting with Fredi, the family faced more challenges. Alice's parents had difficulty finding suitable employment. Her mother kept the family afloat with her sewing until her parents

were offered a job running a neighborhood grocery store. Meanwhile, Alice enrolled in school and struggled to fit in. She went from "Ilse" on formal documents to "Elsie" at school, "Illy" at home, "Suzinka" by her parents, to "Sally" by local firemen. When she became a U.S. citizen, she chose "Alice" as her new name.

I was enthralled by Alice's story. In Vienna, the family lived a comfortable life; her father was well-respected as a doctor. They had to give it all up to start over in America, but they were among the lucky ones who lived. I had heard about many Jews who came to New York, but didn't realize they also came across Siberia to Japan and then to Seattle. Alice's poignant, well-written memoir will draw readers in to discover the fate of Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi persecution. The book has won several awards in the young adult and memoir/autobiography categories. I highly recommend reading this one!

April says

"Becoming Alice" is a coming of age memoir that begins on the day during WWII when Nazi soldier's march into Vienna, Austria and ends in Berkeley, California when a young girl finally finds her true self.

Author Alice Rene recounts her childhood with amazing courage and heart while drawing the reader into her story to the point where I could feel the emotions she must have felt. She was only 6 when her family had to escape Vienna and to see that drama unfold through the eyes of a child was often heart-wrenching but always hopeful. Upon arriving in the US they struggled in a city and culture that was very different from where they came from and Alice found she didn't fit in with the other children her age. I could totally relate to that, although for different reasons, and became embroiled in Alice's attempts to be like everyone else. She even changed her name from Ilse to Alice in an effort to seem more American to those she met.

Eventually Alice realized it would take more than a name change and that what she really needed to do was find her own identity somewhere between her Jewish roots and the American culture. I really think this is something everyone can empathize with, as we all struggle to find our identities, and Alice does an excellent job of describing her battles with her family and herself as she searches for her path in life.

This memoir is a true gem that will have you laughing and crying right along with Alice as she goes through the good times and the bad. Young adults and anyone who had trouble fitting in will relate to her challenges in her new American environment and her journey to be her own person. I recommend this book for anyone interested in WWII Jewish history, young adults struggling to find their place in the world, or anyone who likes good story-telling.

Donna says

Our book club read *Becoming Alice* for our March 2017 pick. I met Alice once a few years ago at a OVCC Garden Tour and she told me about her book. I immediately downloaded it and forgot about it. So when it was my turn to pick a book for our club I remembered this one and decided we all would read it. I am so glad I did.

The group thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. It's the story of a very young girl that comes to America to flee from the Nazis. Her father is a doctor but can't practice in Oregon (where they now live) so he must do menial work which makes him very angry. The family takes on the running of a grocery store which Alice's

mom shines in. Her mother, to me, was the most fascinating person. She was strong and powerful but so understated about it.

The book takes you through Alice's life as she grows up - through all her schooling and romances and struggles to find her way. The way she interacts with her family, her schoolmates and the embarrassment of looking and dressing different.

The book was an easy read. Everyone in our book club enjoyed it.

Todd Fonseca says

The daughter of a successful Austrian physician, young Ilse had a privileged life. That changed the day the Nazi's marched down her street in Vienna. Suddenly, the family housekeeper could not longer come to their home and her father could no longer see patients. Having no income, her family sold their possessions on the black market to survive. Fearing for their lives, they fled Austria and embarked on a harrowing journey to America staying one step ahead of the Germans.

Set against the backdrop of one of the world's most tragic events, Alice Rene's *Becoming Alice* is a different type of coming of age Memoir. The impact of Hitler's advance throughout Europe profoundly impacted so many and Rene's family was no different. Rene's father struggles to make piece with the fact his once prominent position as a physician is gone and he must try to make ends meet as a grocer. Her mother, intelligent and resourceful, cares little about position and pragmatically seeks for ways to help the family survive almost in secret in fear that her husband will hold her in contempt. Rene's older brother is forever seeking success in life and in love. All the while, little Ilse is out of sorts trying to placate all family members while finding her own way as a poor immigrant looking to fit in just like any other young girl.

Through all of these experiences, Ilse eventually finds her way. What type of person does she want to be? Who will she depend on? Who will she be friends with? Who will she love? Ilse becomes Alice.

One can not help but wonder what life would have been like for the Rene's family had world events not had transpired as they did. Her father would likely to have continued as a successful physician and Alice's coming of age would have been much different as the daughter of such a prominent family. Rene ends *Becoming Alice* with a few very satisfying comments on the eventual paths life has taken for many of the people featured in her Memoir.

Though her experiences are extraordinary, Rene's Memoir causes a great deal of self reflection on the readers part forcing all of us to appreciate how our own experiences have so profoundly shaped our lives.

Stuart says

An Absorbing & Remarkable Tale of Survival

Alice Rene's poignant memoir begins during a devastating chapter of history; the Holocaust. Ilise is a six-year-old young girl living in Vienna, Austria when the Nazi soldiers enter her life. What follows is a

suspenseful, harrowing and highly worrisome journey as Ilise and her family flees their homeland.

The year is 1940 when family eventually arrives at the safety of America. Ilise faces challenges and (like all adolescents) desperately wants to fit in and be accepted in her new country. She changes her name to Rene and learns English in her quest to live life as an American.

Rene does an exceptional job of taking the (reader) on a journey of life when faced with multiple adversities to overcome. To sum it up, I am very glad to have read, *Becoming Alice*.

Highly recommended reading for all.

Daniel Hiland says

"*Becoming Alice*" was a good read. Her descriptions of life in wartime Europe, as well as her family's escape to the United States, are well done and compelling. What makes her story different from others of this kind is that there are really two stories- her time in Europe and her subsequent life in the United States. Of further interest to me was that her family moved to the same city that I grew up in, so I recognized many of the locations she described. And meeting her at a book fair in Ojai, California, several years ago made the book even more personal. She was a charming woman and open to questions about her writing. I found her words and demeanor very inspiring, as I was trying to finish writing a memoir at that time.

Jacqui Hencsie says

A really moving book. More later

Puchtelld says

I received this free through Goodreads First Reads. I loved this book. I want to use it with my kids in my classroom. I love Anne Frank, but there are thousands of other people that went through the Holocaust and I can't wait to have this in my classroom. It did take me awhile to get to the book but I am glad I won this book. I will cherish it and pray this book touches others the way it did me!!! Alice you are a survivor and I love the way you write!! Thank you for this beautiful piece of history and a look into you and your family. Please read this and look through other eyes that had to go through this horrible thing!!

Kate says

I really enjoyed *Becoming Alice* by Alice Rene. The first part of the book was about her and her family's escape from Vienna when the Nazis arrived. The rest of the book covers her new life in the United States and her struggle to fit in. This aspect of her story was very interesting to read, considering what she had already been through. She really gave an in depth look at what it was like for immigrants trying to adjust to their new country and their new life. It was an exciting read and I think it is really great that she shared her story. The

way she describes events makes the reader feel as though they are there with her. I highly recommend this book.
