



Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest (Willie Morris Books in Memoir and Biography)

Andrea Simon

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Haunted by her grandmother's Old World stories and bigger-than-life persona, Andrea Simon undertook a spiritual search for her lost family. Her sojourn, a quest for truth, gave her tragic answers.

On a group tour of ancestral Jewish homeland sites that had been crushed in the Holocaust, she makes a riveting detour to her grandmother's village of Volchin, in what is now Belarus, where the last known family members had lived. There, she followed the trail of the death march taken by the village Jews to the place of their slaughter by Nazis and Nazi collaborators in the fall of 1942. During the same period, in Brona Gora, a forest between Brest and Minsk, some 50,000 Jews were shot. Simon was in one of the first American groups to visit this little-publicized site.

Bashert, the Yiddish word for fate, guided her through the arduous quest. With newly translated archival records, she peeled back layers of clues to confront the mystery. This story of her momentous odyssey reveals the terrible fate of her kin.

Mass shootings of Jews, particularly in the Soviet Union, have not been addressed with the same focus given to concentration-camp atrocities. Yet Simon's research reveals that Nazis killed nearly fifty percent of their Jewish victims by means other than gassing. In the historiography of the era, comparatively scant reference is made to the executions at Brona Gora. Thus Simon fills a significant gap in Holocaust history by providing the most extensive report yet given on the executions at Brona Gora and Volchin.

As she interweaves tragic narrative with evocative family anecdotes, Simon writes a story of life in czarist Russia and, within this frame, of her family's flight from pogroms and persecution. From a unique vantage Simon's memoir discloses her dogged genealogical search, the newly perceived Jewish history she uncovered, and the ramifications of the Holocaust in the postwar generation.

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