

After the End: A Novel

by Kelli Christiansen

Synopsis

What happens after war ends?

For Sarah Morgenstern, Liberation Day doesn't mark the end of World War II. Nor does VE Day. Rather, these milestones signal merely a new phase of wartime existence, launching Sarah on a journey that will send her traveling across Europe in a quest to find what might remain of her family and her home—and the life she knew before the Nazis took everything.

After the End opens on May 5, 1945, three days after the 82nd Airborne and the U.S. 8th Infantry Division liberated Wöbbelin concentration camp. Sarah Morgenstern has survived the death march that killed her older sister. She has survived the camps where she last saw her parents: her father at Auschwitz and her mother at Neuengamme. She has survived four years packed into Łódź Ghetto with hundreds of thousands of other persecuted Jews. She has survived three years in Luxembourg after having escaped Berlin shortly after the Nuremberg Laws were passed.

But has she survived alone?

With nothing to her name but the filthy, raggedy camp uniform on her back, Sarah welcomes the end of the war. She is a survivor. But amidst the chaos of Liberation, she has nothing else: no clothes, no home, no papers. She has no one else: no one from her immediate family, none of her girlhood friends. She is barely twenty-one years old. She has lost her teenage years to the Nazis, her school years to the Nazis, her innocence to the Nazis.

Now, in May 1945, Sarah suddenly must navigate yet another new world. This new world is one in which she is liberated but not entirely free. Now a “displaced person” instead of a prisoner, she and thousands of other survivors remain confined to Wöbbelin before being transported to Feldafing, still under guard, although now under the watchful eyes of the Americans.

While some of her fellow survivors long to be repatriated, some aim to immigrate to Palestine, creating new homes and new lives in a new homeland: Israel. Sarah, however, realizes that she has no home: Berlin and the rest of Germany abandoned her and her family a decade earlier; Luxembourg was but a temporary residence; Israel holds little appeal for her. Sarah determines that her first step must be to find her parents, to learn whether they are still alive. Only then can she decide where—and with whom—to begin living the rest of her life.

So begins her journey across Germany and Luxembourg, travels she makes with the help of new friends who will change her life—again and forever. These new friends not only help Sarah discover the fate of her parents but also help restore her to humanity, to wholeness. They treat her as an equal. They treat her with kindness. They show her what it means to be human again. They show her what friendship looks like and feels like. They give her a new sense of family.

During the year following Liberation, Sarah reenters society. She begins a job working as a translator with the U.S. Army. She makes lasting friendships. She lets go of some of the fears she

developed growing-up under Nazi rule. She discovers the fate of her family. And she makes a decision that will set the direction for the rest of her life—a new beginning in the wake of war.

Sarah does this alongside millions of other displaced persons during the chaotic months following the end of World War II. Set against the backdrop of postwar Germany, *After the End* explores the uncertain future of just one of the millions of Jews who survived the War. It delves into the convoluted trajectories survivors followed in order to recapture their old lives—and to begin their new lives. It is a story rarely told, focusing not on the experience of concentration camp victims during the War, but on the experience of survivors after the war; focusing not on the frothy intrigue of wartime treachery or romance, but on the gritty reality survivors faced when transitioning from prisoners to displaced persons to citizens of new homelands.

In this novel of roughly 97,000 words, *After the End* traces the trying, twisted journey one survivor must take in order to start the rest of her life. It is a story of despair and hope, of loss and love, of uncertainty and dreams. *After the End* reminds us that home and family are not only about where you are born and who you are born to and more about where you belong and who you belong with.

Market and Audience

After the End will appeal to readers of historical fiction, particularly those who enjoy stories of wartime. With its strong female characters, readers who read women's fiction also will enjoy *After the End*. A sequel focusing on Sarah's life as a survivor, wife, and mother in her new homeland also is in process.

Related Titles

Few novels focus specifically on the postwar experience of Holocaust survivors or displaced persons in general. As such, *After the End* fills a gap in the literature. Some similar(ish) titles:

- Dana Fitzwater Cornell, *My Mother's Ring*. CreateSpace, 2013. A runner-up in the 2013 London Book Festival.
- Lily Graham, *The Paris Secret*. Bookouture, 2018. A Top 100 title in Historical Fiction on Amazon.
- Georgia Hunter, *We Were the Lucky Ones*. Viking, 2017. A *New York Times* bestseller.
- Diane Moody, *The War Trilogy*. Independently published, 2012–18. *Of Windmills and War* (Book One) is an Amazon bestseller with more than 50,000 copies sold.

About the Author

Kelli Christiansen (Glen Ellyn, IL) has spent three decades in publishing. Her fiction has appeared in such publications as *Chicago Literati*; *Faith, Hope & Fiction*; and *Midwestern Gothic*; her literary criticism has appeared in such outlets as *Chicago Book Review*, *Chicago Life*; *Midwest Book Review*, and *San Francisco Book Review*; and her nonfiction work has appeared in such media as *Book Business Magazine*, *Carol Stream Press*, and *Collections & Credit Risk Magazine*. A popular speaker, she has appeared in front of audiences large and small for such organizations as Chicago Book Expo, Chicago Women in Publishing, Chicago Writers Conference, Military History Fest, and University of Chicago. In 2016, Kelli earned the James Friend Memorial Award for Literary and Dramatic Criticism by Society of Midland Authors for her work as the founder and editor Chicago Book Review (2013–17).