



# No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War

*Anita Lobel*

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## No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War Anita Lobel

The beloved Caldecott Honor artist now recounts a tale of vastly different kind -- her own achingly potent memoir of a childhood of flight, imprisonment, and uncommon bravery in Nazi-occupied Poland. Anita Lobel was barely five when the war began and sixteen by the time she came to America from Sweden, where she had been sent to recover at the end of the war. This haunting book, illustrated with the author's archival photographs, is the remarkable account of her life during those years. Poised, forthright, and always ready to embrace life, Anita Lobel is the main character in the most personal story she will ever tell. Anita Lobel was barely five years old when World War II began and the Nazis burst into her home in Krakow, Poland, changing her life forever. She spent the days of her childhood in hiding with her brother--who was disguised as a girl--and their Catholic nanny in the countryside, the ghetto, and finally in a convent where the Nazis caught up with her. She was imprisoned in a succession of concentration camps until the end of the war. Sent by the Red Cross to recuperate in Sweden, she slowly blossomed as she discovered books and language and art. Since coming to the United States as a teenager, Anita Lobel has spent her life making pictures. She has never gone back. She has never looked back. Until now.

## No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War Details

Date : Published February 2nd 2000 by HarperTrophy (first published 1998)

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# From Reader Review No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War for online ebook

## Kathy Krieg says

This was a well written story was told by a child's perspective. Such brave survivors!

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## Iva says

What an experience Anita Lobel had. She protected her younger brother, managed to survive a concentration camp and ended up in Sweden. Miraculously, the two were reunited with her parents after their release, in Sweden. Lobel had lived an upper middle class life in Krakow; had a colorful live-in and Catholic nanny who didn't like Jews or Jewish customs, but was loyal and protective of "her children". Plainly written but hugely readable make this a haunting and readable reading experience for older children and adults.

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## Devon Flaherty says

No Pretty Pictures: a Child of War, by Anita Lobel. Published by Greenwillow Books, New York, in 1998, with an unfortunately drab and unexceptional cover (especially considering that the author is known as a children's illustrator). The more recent 2008 reissue cover is much better.

DISCLAIMER: I do not see this as a children's or even YA book. It takes quite a bit of maturity to digest the contents.

Let's start with the author, because that is where I started. In fact, it was with her husband, the author of the Frog and Toad series that got me here. My son and I both have fallen in love with the Frog and Toad series over the past several months, and so I gathered in as many Arnold Lobel books from the library as I could find. Then, with the acquisition of On Market Street, I began to notice the other half of the couple, Anita Lobel. So I gathered her books, as well. This came home with me from the library.

Anita Kempler was born in Poland just before World War II, which would prove to be important because she was Jewish and the Nazis were on their way. The story of her childhood in the Holocaust is told in No Pretty Pictures, and I don't want to spoil it for you, but one by one her family disappeared as she and her brother managed to cling together and almost magically survive. She ended up in Sweden and then America, where she went to college to receive a BFA and where she met her husband. In the 50s and into the 60s, she was a textile designer. Her first book, Sven's Bridge, was published in 1965. Lobel has won a Caldecott Honor, Best Illustrated Books, and has been both a writer and an illustrator throughout her long and successful career in children's books.

No Pretty Pictures--Lobel's autobiography about her experience as a Polish Jew in Europe during the reign of the Nazis--is the outlier, as far as genre. Still, it won her a spot as a National Book Award finalist. You sort of get the impression that she wrote the book because it's a story she's often been asked to tell and record, and it ends up a sort of no-nonsense narration. As I started it, I wasn't sure what to expect.

I couldn't put it down. I kept reading when I should have been sleeping. And--most telling--I kept talking about it for weeks afterward. It isn't so much the style or even the scope of this story (I sort of thought I had out-read the subject, to be honest), but the complete transparency. The events are what they were, there's little to no emotional overlay, no playing around, no fencing things off.

Of course, Lobel's experience of the war is not exhaustive or comprehensive, but she basically experienced what you already know the Jews experienced. What is so fascinating about her story is four-fold. First, she experienced many different situations, from hiding out to running to being captured. She was in the ghetto. She was in a concentration camp. She was in a convent. She was in the countryside. She was in the city. Etc. Second, the detail with which she recalls her childhood and the events is absorbing and fascinating. You understand, right away, that she was always a bright and observant child, if not a perfect one. Three, she doesn't hide anything. There were so many times that I poked my husband and said, "Have you ever thought about that aspect of the Holocaust?" Anecdote after anecdote, you will walk hand-in-hand with her as she relays about lice and thieves and diarrhea and old potatoes and--unbelievably enough--the occasional exploitation and weary disconcert of other Jews toward two wandering children.

Fourth, this is an incredibly humane book. And I don't mean that it's "nice to people," I mean that it has a tremendous grasp of and honesty about people. She deals very little with the Nazis, but explores that multi-faceted depths of herself, her family, and her protectors. This means, at times, that you recognize both her foibles and also the sad inability of those who should have loved her best. Her nanny is perhaps one of the most conflicted characters I have ever read, fiction or not.

It's bleak, but it's also a little bit wonderful. She never should have made it, and yet she did.

I highly recommend this book. It's a nail-biter and a great study of the human character.

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#### QUOTES:

"Somewhere there must be a terrible place. A barren area with no light. With leafless trees and no blue in the sky. Where these words stopped being just words and became real things" (p9).

"Below us, above us, we felt the hushed lives of caged people. Waiting for something to change. Praying for rescuers. Even dreaming that the Nazis would lose interest, yawn, and go away" (p45).

"I didn't know that from hunger one could cave into loss of consciousness, to hallucinations. It never happened to me" (p110).

"Somewhere, before Montelupi, before Plaszow, my brother and I had been forced to leave ourselves. Anchored in numbness, our bodies were nothing but two hungry, itching lumps" (p111).

"I pounced on the groaning board of words, of history dates, of stories, of poems, of the columns of sums to be calculated" (p169).

"But the language I used to speak so excellently when I took my first civilizing steps as a young girl has to be wakened from its veiled sleep" (p189).

"She worshiped the Holy Mother, mistrusted Jews, yet she protected my brother and me with the flapping

wings of a demented angel" (p189).

"Or was she dragged along the ground like the woman in our transport to Plaszow? I can picture it. I will never know" (p190).

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### **Sarah says**

Great book, loved how it portrayed what she went through, with out graphic details. There were only 3 times that I was a little bothered, two of the times was she used a swear word in the correct context, I would've just preferred reading, poop and bum instead of the words we've come to know as swear words. The other time she looked through a key hole and saw a naked nun bathing, she felt so guilty about looking, yet wanted to look again. This could bring up a great conversation for older children, where in our day and age pornography is so easily attained.

It gave a great perspective of a young girl always changing and adapting to her new environments. Loved being able to see and feel her fears and excitements. I think this is one of my new favorites because I feel I understood more about how the war affected her and I could relate.

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### **Cindy says**

This is a story written by a famous children's illustrator about her life as a Polish Jewish child during WWII. Five when the war started, she spent many years of the war hidden by her nanny and then the last couple in a concentration camp. After their liberation she lived Sweden for almost 10 years before her family emigrated to the United States.

I think I was surprised by the dispassionate voice of the book. One of the only parts of the book that was particularly passionate was the end when the family moved to the United States and she wished she could stay in Sweden. Another time when I felt emotion was when she described the shame she felt (for a long time after the war) about being Jewish.

I was amazed by the heroism of the nanny in this story. These children weren't her own, and yet she went to great lengths to care for them for years, even though it must have put her in danger.

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### **Lindsay G says**

The book No Pretty Pictures is an amazing book about a girl named Hanasu living through the holocaust. One morning Hanasu woke up to find her father gone. When she asked her mother where he went, she regretfully informed her that her father had been taken away that night by Nazis. Hanasu thought he was going to come back, and did not know that he was taken away because he was Jewish. Hanasu had a younger brother but once their mother realized that they were in danger, he had to pretend he was a girl. They both went to live in Poland with their nanny, Niania. Niania was not Jewish and pretended to be their mother. They were safe for a couple years and pretended to be christian too. One day however, some Nazis stormed into where they were staying and demanded to take them away, along with other Jews hiding there. Hanasu and her brother were taken to a concentration camp where they thought they were for sure going to be shot.

They were saved by their cousin, aunt and and uncle who was also at that concentration camp. Somehow, they got “lucky” and survived the holocaust. Their whole family worked to get their lives back to normal, the kids went back to school, and the dad got a job. Read this book to find out how they turn their lives around. This book is structured in chapters. There are some pictures of Hanasu and her brother at points in the book. I think the book is organized and laid out in a way that helps readers access and understand the information effectively. I thought the authors writing style was very descriptive and interesting. This book was extremely interesting especially because I have always wanted to know more about the holocaust and what it was like for a girl my age to go through it. The author definitely seems like a credible expert on the subject because she went through this and experienced everything her self. The author does seem biased because obviously she does not think what the Germans did was completely wrong and terrible to the jews. She was obviously biased against Hitler and she had very good reasons to be. I think the author did an amazing job of making a vivid picture in your mind of the concentration camps and of everything she went through. I think that every Jewish teenager and more should read this book because it reminds us and teaches us how lucky we are and what Jewish people once went through. I would rate this book 4 out of 4 stars because it was amazing.

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### **Caroline Hennessy says**

Anita Lobel was raised in one of the toughest places and times to be raised. Living as a Jewish child in Kraków, Poland during the Holocaust Anita was faced with the toughest of challenges. Anita and her brother were separated from their family, captured by Germans, and lived years without seeing her parents practically raising herself and brother. This hard to read story told the story of a lot of kids in the Holocaust which made it very fascinating. Moving from country to country was how Anita and her brother spent the early years of their childhood. Anita, her brother, parents and Niania their nanny were faced with the toughest choices they ever had to make. This book really captures the relationship between Anita and Niania as well as Anita and her brother. Anita was a very strong little girl who made choices which may have saved her and her brothers lives. This historical book was very good and a very real story.

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### **Lisa Matheny says**

ignore every review that isn't 5 star. Excellent.

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### **Dayana Galeano says**

The book No Pretty Picture: A Child of War is an example of a prodigious read. Anita Lobel’s story is unbelievable. Anita Lobel is a long-suffering Jewish survivor who managed to get through all the difficult moments in her life during WWII. This book is based on the horrible experiences that Jews and non-jews went through for approximately 6 years, starting from 1939 to 1945. This book will give you a different perspective on how you thought the Concentration Camps were really like.

Anita Lobel was only a 5-year-old Jewish little girl when Germany invaded her country in 1939. When the German army invaded Poland, Anita went into hiding with her younger brother and her Christian nanny, Niania, who did not like Jews. Yet she felt she had an obligation to care and protect for Anita and her younger brother. Having little connection with her mother and her father being away caused them to struggle financially since her nanny did not have much to offer them. Things took an unexpected turn when Anita and

her younger brother were caught and taken by the Nazi's to a concentration camp. The things they went through in those camps were just horrific, and it was just the beginning.

This book is many things all at once. It's amusing, understandable, terrifying and a moving story. Anita Lobel did an outstanding job going in depth with the characters and being detailed with every scene that occurred in the book. It somehow can give you a sense of the setting. It was beyond amazing getting to understand how WWII was through the eyes of an adolescent. A child whose adolescence was taken away from her. This book just like all the other books about The Holocaust taught me many more things that I did not know about the Concentration Camps and WWII in general.

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### **Amy says**

This is a non-fiction book written by a Jewish woman who was five years old when WW II started. She went into hiding with her Christian nanny, who ironically does not like Jews, but wants to protect the author and her brother so she claims they are her children. After moving from place to place in hiding and having almost no contact with her mother or father, she is captured by the Nazi's and taken to a concentration camp. During the last few months of the war she experiences all of the horrors of the concentration camps and the death march just prior to the concentration camps being liberated. After liberation she is taken to Sweden, reunited with her family, and recovers physically from her ordeal. The author has a very descriptive writing style and explains a lot of the emotional issues she faced because of her experience. She explains her dislike of her homeland and her Jewish ancestry because for so much of her childhood these caused the biggest problems in her life.

The Holocaust is of interest to teens because it is one of history's great injustices. Teens tend to feel a lot of things in their lives are unjust and so they identify with the survivors in a way. However, it also helps teens put their injustices in perspective. Many teens are beginning to want to change the world and do things differently than they have been done before. The Holocaust is a great example of a society's need for change and abandonment of old ways of thinking. I think the entire world, not just teens, is in awe of the Holocaust because it's hard to believe that things could go so wrong, on such a wide scale, for so long.

The most obvious Developmental Asset that was addressed in this book is Equality and Social Justice. However, there was also a lot of Caring and Other Adult Relationships going on as the nanny took care of these Jewish children who were not hers and the allied forces liberated the concentration camps. A different kind of Family Support is illustrated when the author and her brother are saved from execution by extended family and how the families tried to take care of each other even in the concentration camps and hiding.

Because this is non-fiction, the author is very believable. Her writing style is such that she really paints a picture of her life during those years and that is very moving also. I think the attitude of the nanny also adds to the voice of the story because she dislikes "dirty Jews", but is clearly against the governments' treatment of them. She spends her life saving the lives of the author and her brother, despite the fact that she is quite prejudiced herself.

I would promote this book to teens who are interested in social injustice and overcoming impossible odds. The author has her entire childhood robbed of her by a circumstance clearly beyond her control. She describes herself as a person born in the wrong time and place. I think some teens feel that way and it would be a good

hook for them. It is also a good survivor story for teens who like that because she is one of the few children who made it through that time and place in the world and lived to tell about it. Just asking teens if they think you could be a 5 year old Jew in Poland at the beginning of WW II and live to tell about it would interest some teens.

5Q, 2P, S

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### **Sassa says**

A true story of perseverance, courage and honesty by a woman who, as a Jewish young child, faced persecution and imprisonment in Nazi -occupied Poland. Older children should read this, too. Great family discussions could arise.

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### **Erin says**

I read the book, No Pretty Picture by Anita Lobel. After reading this non-fiction book aching as I could never myself imagine growing up in a time period that the author did. The book starts with her own remarks about being born and living in Poland in the wrong place at the wrong time. The author, Anita Lobel, immigrated to the United States as a teenager following the war. Anita writes straight from the heart with her very detail first-hand account of the Holocaust. From the beginning, I felt very engaged, as the events of the Nazis invading Poland and the author's father being taken sucked me into the book. Anita's mother trust their nanny to take and hide the children from capture. Ironically the nanny was Catholic and dislikes Jews but had an unconditional love for the children. The relationship between the nanny and children was complex at times, but it added to the overall tone of the novel. She had a love-hate relationship with the children. She pretended they were her own children but, she had to sacrifice her personal life to keep them safe. Nianna, the nanny, also converted Anita into a Christian when traveling across the country to keep them safe. This book pulled at my heartstrings as the author blames her mother for the reason they have to flee from their safe place. In the events of the mother desperately wanting to see her children they get captured. I felt so invested and it pained me to read of all the horrors of the concentration camp. Though they had been captured later in the war, it felt as if they were in the camp forever. After the liberation came the recovery, finally a happy ending. I did feel as this part of the novel dragged on a bit and was harder to finish. Some of the ending parts were repetitive and made the book go on forever. The author made me empathize and at points felt like crying thinking about the nightmare of a childhood she faced. It makes me reflect not to take anything for granted. I gained a new perspective about childhood. Not every child is given an easy childhood, that they are fighting a battle of internal and external conflicts. I would recommend this book as I certainly enjoyed reading and learning it. This book opened my eyes, as it would for others, and taught me a new view of the people who lived through hell, or the Holocaust.

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### **Debbi says**

Anita Lobel is known as a Children's book illustrator not an author and I think it shows. The book is good but a bit drawn out and not very captivating. I think it would have been better if she had shortened it by quite a bit. It would have been hard since a lot happened to her in a short 10 years of her life.



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**Nick.Dab says**

it was the best book ever

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**Marie says**

Poland

"I soon began to take for granted that life was always lived on the edge or in the shadow of terrible threats.

"Please make my brother and I invisible."

"They had caught up with us at last."

"My scalp never stopped itching. The Nazis' was had permanently sprinkled us with lice."

"The woman whose boy had been taken from her began to scream. Horribly. Her screams sliced through the icy night, hung there, suspended, useless, beyond help."

"It was only yesterday, but it seemed as if years had passed. I looked back. On the other side, there, behind us, we had left a world of hunger and mud and stench and corpses."

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**Kate Madigan says**

Initially I debated between a 3 and a 4 for this book but ultimately decided on the latter because I felt the writing deserved it. I found myself struggling to connect with the main character and her desire to rid herself of anything family-related or identifiably Jewish. I wanted her to feel pride instead of shame or disgust. Her lack of any kind of emotional connection to her parents in particular bothered me. However, upon reflecting on this, I realized her reaction to herself and family was just one more example of how the Nazis continued to victimize her long after the war had ended. The crumbling of the family unit after the war was not an uncommon thing for families trying to reconnect after so much time apart. In a way I think it also exposed some of my own fears. What if I was taken away from my child while she was still young? Would she lose the connection we have and the memories of love? Overall, it is very well written and provides an interesting perspective.

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## **Amanda says**

I enjoyed reading this memoir, which is centered on the holocaust. Several parts made me feel sick inside. How could we have allowed the holocaust to happen? But it happened. This account is heartfelt, real, touching. It's from the perspective of a young girl. I've read *Briar Rose* by Jane Yolen, but I've never looked at the holocaust through the eyes of a child. The introspection made this account engaging and real for me. It also encouraged me to explore more literature and accounts on the holocaust.

I was disturbed by the thought process of the young girl. The holocaust tore at her faith, at everything she knew and believed. She didn't want to be a Jew anymore. She wanted to fit in. She fit in when her parents could not. She adapted to the harsh environments surrounding her when others could not. She stopped trusting adults. These are dangerous messages that will affect readers. Caution should be used when reading this book because it makes the reader question their beliefs and faith. However, the power in this memoir comes from the questioning, the introspection. It would not be as powerful, moving, and truthful if these elements were not included. All I am suggesting is that caution should be used when reading the book.

Spoilers—Content to be aware of:

Sex: Narrator and her brother see a naked nun bathing. Narrator is convinced that this must be a sin and is ashamed and frightened (58). Narrator's brother pretends to be a girl for several years in order to protect him from being captured by the Nazis. When the narrator and her brother are captured, the Nazis make them take off their clothes to prove that the narrator's brother is a boy and a Jew (75). Narrator's cousin gives the narrator a bath in front of a German soldier (93). Narrator goes to the bathroom in an unpleasant situation (106). All prisoners are forced to remove their clothes and pass naked in front of the German soldiers (108).

Violence: Narrator and her brother are captured by the Nazis (75). The concentration camps are described in detail. Several Jews and other prisoners are shot. Narrator and her brother suffer from several illnesses but are spared work and other horrors.

Profanity: minimal

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## **Maggie Mattmiller says**

One of those ratings that isn't about the person, the author, or the actual story content- Ms. Lobel sounds like she has had quite the life experiences! I just didn't find the writing to be super engaging. It didn't pull me in.

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## **Gary Bernard says**

The autobiography *No Pretty Pictures* presents an important story of family, faith, and finding oneself in the midst of truly horrible circumstances. Young Anita was a Jewish youth in Poland when the Nazis invaded. Her father fled the country, and young Anita was left in the care of her Jewish mother and Catholic

nanny. As Anita looks back at her experiences during the war, we go with the young girl who is thrust from a simple yet prosperous life into a life living in slums in constant fear of being discovered. We go with her as she eventually is caught and forced into unfathomable conditions, and finally we go with her as she is rescued and struggles to deal with the atrocities faced and work to fit into a normal life.

I was fascinated by the book, and I recommend it to those seeking to understand better the struggles faced by mankind. Reading the experiences from the eyes of an innocent young girl really puts things into perspective. There are many instances of violence, language, and graphic descriptions of sickness and death.

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## Jgrace says

### **No Pretty Pictures: a child of war** –Anita Lobel

3 stars

Anita Lobel is an award winning illustrator of children's books. I love her artwork. I have read **On Market Street** and **The Rose in My Garden** to many groups of children. Her pictures are vibrant and full of life. Although the title prepared me, I was deeply affected by her stark, unadorned memoir of her childhood. She was barely five years old, essentially the age of children that I teach, when the Germans invaded Poland. She does not relate her story in a child's voice, but she tells it from the child's perspective without adding adult interpretations or explanations until the epilog of the book. From my adult perspective this made the story even more horrifying. There is the helpless child who does not, cannot, understand what is happening to her. The miraculous thing is that Anita and her young brother, who was frequently disguised as a girl, did survive the concentration camp. They were liberated and sent as refugees to Sweden. In Sweden they recovered from tuberculosis in a sanatorium until they were reunited with both of their surviving parents.

This memoir was intended for a young adult audience so the language is simple. I found myself wanting more from the narrator as she described her own reactions to being reunited with her family. She frequently refers to her own confusion about religious issues, but she never speaks to how she personally resolved these questions. There is an emotional distance in the telling of this story that is not a result of the reduced vocabulary. I think that Anita Lobel's emotional expression is in her artwork, not in her prose.

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