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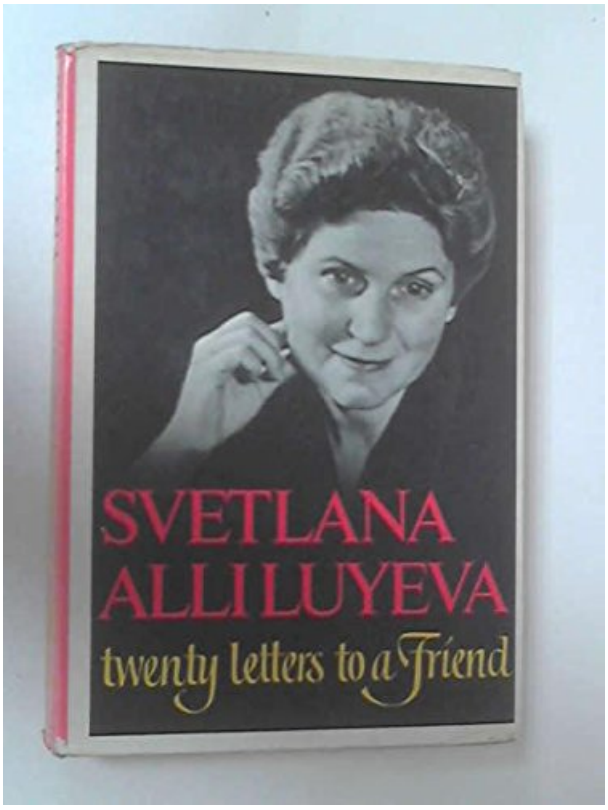

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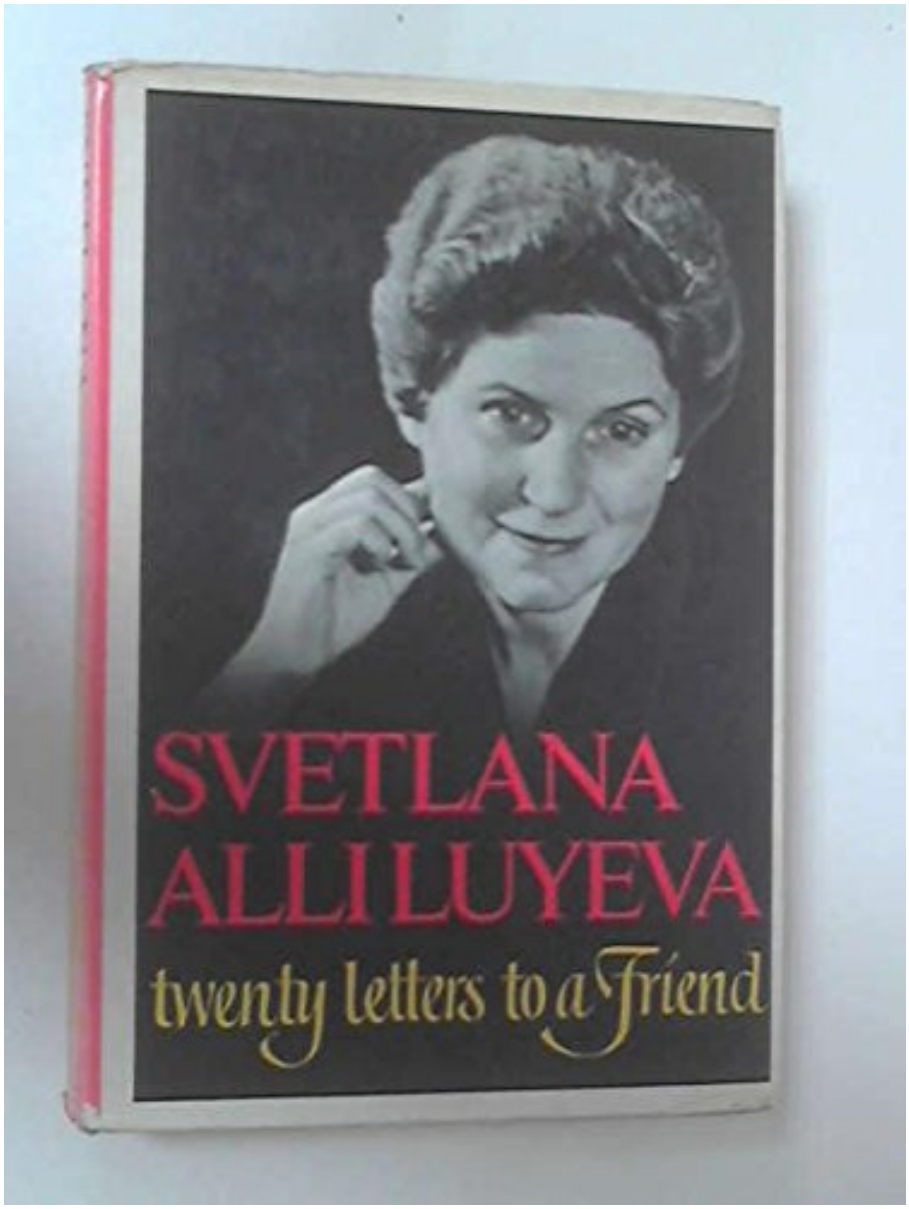

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Twenty Letters to a Friend by Svetlana Alliluyeva (BOMC)

- Sales Rank: #1028278 in Books
- Published on: 1967
- Binding: Hardcover
- 246 pages

Most helpful customer reviews

33 of 35 people found the following review helpful.
Twenty Letters to a Friend
By David M. Burke MD
This is a well translated history of Stalin personal life from her own perspective written using the literature style of writing letters to a friend, which are sketches depicting her relationship with her father at different stages of her life. The first one depicts the death of Stalin in which she vividly describes the dynamics between Stalin associate (Beria etc...)
I have the opportunity to own some of the letters she wrote to her editor written in English and it sound that she is a stickler for details, which makes these accounts most believable.
This book offers a unique opportunity to see a different facet of Stalin personality from her perspective as a child and her coming to age. The book gives account of the discovery of her father true personality, which she started to uncover after the tragic death of her mother and subsequent distancing of herself and her father.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.
Stalin's Daughter Remembers
By Gerard Reed
When Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, fled the Soviet Union in 1967, she brought with her a manuscript—Twenty Letters to a Friend (New York: Discus Books, c. 1967)—describing important aspects of her life, which became an instant best-seller published in many languages. She wrote the book in 35 days in 1963 just to put her thoughts on paper and did not envision publishing it while living in her own country. She mainly recorded memories of her mother and father, bearing witness to the insatiable longing children have to be with and love their parents, but in the process she tried to make sense of what happened around her and thus gives us insight into what took place in Russia during her lifetime, for: “The twentieth century and the Revolution turned everything upside down” (p. 30).
Several years after her father died she took her mother’s family name, Alliluyeva—a word akin to “Hallelujah” meaning “Praise ye the Lord.” She fondly remembers both her mother and her maternal grandparents. When Stalin married her mother, her grandparents became part of a nurturing extended family. Grandfather Alliluyeva was born a peasant in Georgia but became a skilled mechanic who joined the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party in 1898 and retained an old-fashioned revolutionary idealism and personal integrity until he died in 1945. Her grandmother was also from Georgia, the descendent of German settlers, who spoke Georgian with a German accent. Reared in a Protestant church she “was always religious,”

stoutly resisting the atheistic propaganda surrounding her. “By the time I was thirty-five,” Svetlana says, “I realized that grandmother was wiser than any of us” (p. 54). That wisdom, she came to believe, was nurtured by a religious perspective she ultimately shared.

Pondering her maternal grandparents’ influence, Svetlana credited their love for Georgia for instilling in her a love for the beauty of nature. “O Lord,” she wrote, “how lovely is this earth of yours and how perfect, every blade of grass, every flower and leaf! You go on supporting man and giving him strength in this fearful bedlam where Nature alone, invincible and eternal, gives solace and strength, harmony and tranquility of spirit” (p. 82). Amidst all the destruction wrought by various “madmen” who ravage the earth, its “beauty and majesty” needs to be revered. Still more: “It seems to me that in our time faith in God is the same thing as faith in good and the ultimate triumph of good over evil” (p. 83). Consequently, “By the time I was thirty-five and had seen something of life, I, who’d been taught from earliest childhood by society and my family to be an atheist and materials, was already one of those who cannot live without God” (p. 83).

Svetlana’s mother, Nadya, was born in the Caucasus but grew up in St. Petersburg, immersed in the revolutionary activities . Here she met and soon married Joseph Stalin, much older than she, whose first wife had died. Nadya was sincerely devoted to the revolutionary cause, strictly followed Party rules, and was willing to sacrifice her all for the good of the people. Thus she worked a great deal and spent limited time with her children, though when present orchestrated lots of fun and games. Stalin himself proved to be a poor husband, so: “Because my mother was intelligent and endlessly honest, I believe her sensitivity and intuition made her realize finally that my father was not the New Man she had thought when she was young, and she suffered the most terrible, devastating disillusionment” (p. 117). In 1932, following an argument with him regarding the genocidal famine taking place in the Ukraine pursuant to Stalin’s orders, she went to her room and killed herself with a pistol, though Svetlana was told she had died of appendicitis. “Our carefree life, so full of gaiety and games and useful pastimes, fell apart the moment my mother died” (p. 133). Svetlana was six years old.

“For ten years after my mother died, my father was a good father to me” (p. 133). He had always been the more affectionate parent, making sure Svetlana was well cared for in every way, including an excellent education. But when she finished her schooling and became more independent, their relationship frayed. Discovering the real reason for her mother’s death while reading an English magazine further depressed her. By now she was also aware of the growing list of classmates, friends and relatives who had been sent into exile or killed under her father’s rule. When only seventeen she met and fell in love with Alexei Kapler, a noted musician, who seemed to her to be “the cleverest, kindest, most wonderful person on earth” (p. 187). Soon thereafter Kapler was arrested and sentenced to the Gulag for five years, apparently for daring to court Stalin’s daughter! “After that my father and I were estranged for a long time.” Indeed, “I was never again the beloved daughter I had once been” (p. 192). In 1944 she married Grigory Morozov, a fellow university student. Stalin didn’t approve of him either—both Kapler and Morozov were Jews and he harbored a deep anti-Jewish prejudice. He refused to meet him . This and welcomed the news that they divorced soon after she gave birth to a son. She then married the son of a prominent Bolshevik, with whom she had a daughter. This marriage garnered her father’s approval but quickly dissolved.

Despite their estrangement, father and daughter occasionally spent time together following WWII. She found him difficult to talk with and thought the obsequious men surrounding him (Beria, Malenkov, Bulganin) odious. The Communist Party hardly resembled what was envisioned by sincere revolutionaries in 1917. It “had nothing in common with the spirit of my grandfather and my grandmother, my mother, the Svandizes and all the old Party people I knew. It was all hypocritical, a caricature purely for show” (p. 207). How superior were the simple people of the “old Russia” such as Stalin’s own mother! Her “grandmother had principles of her own. They were the principles of one who was old and God-fearing, who’d lived a life that was upright and hard, full of dignity and honor. Changing her life in any whatever was the furthest thing from her mind. She passed on all her stubbornness and firmness, her puritanical standards, her unbending masculine character and her high requirements for herself, to my father.” Still more, when Svetlana visited her paternal grandmother’s grave, she wondered how could she not think about her “without my thoughts

turning to God, in whom she believed so devoutly?" (p. 214). In 1962, less than a decade after her father died, Svetlana was baptized in the Orthodox Church. For her, she explained: "The sacrament of baptism consists in rejecting evil, the lie. I believed in 'Thou shalt not kill,' I believed in truth without violence and bloodshed. I believed that the Supreme Mind, not vain man, governed the world. I believed that the Spirit of Truth was stronger than material values. And when all of this had entered the heart, the shreds of Marxism-Leninism taught me since childhood vanished like smoke."

In the godless world of Stalin's USSR, however, there was little to celebrate. For his daughter, nothing "turned out well" for those she knew. "It was as though my father were at the center of a black circle and anyone who ventured inside vanished or perished or was destroyed in one way or another" (p. 231). Yet despite it all Svetlana found reason for hope. Much about the Russian character evident in her faithful nurse, Alexandra Andreevna, "Granny," still survives. "But what is good in Russia is traditional and unchanging" and ultimately "it is this eternal good which gives Russia strength and helps preserve her true self" (p. 232). When Svetlana's mother died, "Granny" became "the only stable, unchanging thing left. She was the bulwark of home and family, of what, if it hadn't been for her, would have gone out of my life forever" (p. 237). Though not conventionally religious, she retained a deeply moral perspective and faith.

No doubt influenced by both her maternal grandmother and "Granny," Svetlana developed a deeply religious conviction. "The Good always wins out," she said. "The Good triumphs over everything, though it frequently happens too late—not before the very best people have perished unjustly, senselessly, without rhyme or reason" (p. 242). She had witnessed how her father and his revolutionary comrades "tried to do good by doing evil" and ruthlessly "sacrificed senselessly, thousands of talented" human beings (p. 244). Yet she also knew that: "Everything on our tormented earth that is alive and breathes, that blossoms and bears fruit, lives only by virtue of and in the name of Truth and Good" (p. 245).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.
Leave Your Last Chapters Unwritten
By Donald P. Reed
Twenty Letters To A Friend, Svetlana Alliluyeva; Harper & Row (Hardcover 1967)

"Her three successive names were signposts on a twisted, bewildering road that took her from Stalin's Kremlin, where she was the 'little princess,' to the West in a celebrated defection, then back to the Soviet Union in a puzzling homecoming, & finally to decades of obscurity, wandering & poverty.

"At her birth, on Feb. 28, 1926, she was named Svetlana Stalina, the only daughter & last surviving child of the brutal Soviet tyrant Josef Stalin. After he died in 1953, she took her mother's last name, Alliluyeva. In 1970, after her defection & an American marriage, she became & remained Lana Peters..." (Douglas Martin, Nov. 28, 2011)

Twenty Letters was a MASSIVE best-seller in 1967; the above N.Y. Times obituary (2011) reported that the book had earned her "more than $2.5 million."

Putting that number into today's perspective, Svetlana had been handed roughly $17,000,000 - in the same year that the daughter of Joseph Stalin (born Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili, the genocidal ruler of Russia from about 1929 to 1953) had done the unthinkable, defecting to the United States during the Cold War.

I recently finished "Ed' Wynn's Son," Keenan's autobiography. It had a wonderful, upbeat ending. The printer's ink dried in 1959. Afterwards, eventually, Keenan's alcoholism - in the words of his son, Ned - became "a problem of monumental proportions. He worked constantly, made more money than ever [until that inexplicable run also collapsed]... & drank himself into oblivion on a more or less daily basis."

Good bye, Beverly Hills mansion, hello Brentwood rented shack.

Twenty Letters ends on a mystically moving note, somewhat comparable in its optimisim to the ending of EWS. You know where this is going. Svetlana's astonishing debut success (& encore; her next book was a second bonanza) was followed by her own long-term personal disintegration & wanderlust (she re-defected to the USSR! That didn't last long).

Her life ended in rural Wisconsin, in a rundown town that my wife & I, in transit from Spring Green to Iowa in 2012, wanted to see in our rear view mirror, the minute we got there.

Leave your last chapters unwritten.

*****

The following may be useful, should you read the book.

Priscilla McMillan's "Translator's Notes" at the end provide details of the lives of the various Soviet officials, artists & politicians mentioned in Svetlana's letters.

The index is, to an extraordinary extent, a cemetery of the damned.

The fifty-seven names follow in the order they are listed in the foot notes. Information not available in 1967 has been added; mistakes, detected, have been corrected.

A number has been assigned to their respective fates: "1": Assassinated, Murdered, Executed, or Suicide (confirmed; "AMES"); "2": AMES (probable/possible); & "3": Survived.

Not all those categorized as "3" lived in Stalin's lifetime. If they had, they were not all subjected to persecution. All were eyewitnesses to the terror.

It is possible that those who survived their persecution might have been worse off than those who were executed (on trumped-up charges of treason, scapegoats, etc.).

Last Name (index page #) Fate---Details; factual discrepancies (if any)

1) Malenkov (p. 237) 3---Survived; died 1988.

2) Khrushchev (p. 238) 3---Survived; died 1971

3) Bulganin (p. 238) 3---Survived; died 1975

4) Beria (p. 238) 1---Executed 12/23/1953

5) Vinogradov (p. 238) 3---Survived; died 1964

6) Khrustalyov (p. 238) 3---Survived; year deceased unknown

7) Voroshilov (p. 238) 3---Survived; died 1969

8) Kaganovich (p. 238) 3---Survived; died 1991; his brother Mikhail had committed suicide (06/01/1941)

9) Mikoyan (p. 238) 3---Survived; died 1978

10) Repin (p. 239) 3---"1844-1929"; WP: Died 09/29/1930 (artist; not persecuted)

11) Shaposhnikov (p. 239) 3---Survived; died 1945

12) Krylov (p. 239) 3---Died prior to 1917 (not persecuted)

13) Bukharin (p. 239) 1---Executed 03/15/1938

14) Ordzhonikidze (p. 240) 2---"1886-1936"; WP: Died 02/18/1937 from: a) Heart Attack (cover story?); b) Shot; c) Suicide (Khrushchev, 02/25/56)

15) Budyonny (p. 240) 3---Survived; "1833-____"; Wikipedia profile: 1883-1973

16) Yenukidze (p. 240) 1---"Disappeared." WP: Shot 10/30/1937. a/k/a "Enukidze."

17) Molotov, Vyacheslav (p. 240) 3---Survived; died 1986

18) Dzerzhinsky (p. 240) 3---Survived; died 1926

19) Kalinin (p. 240) 3---Survived; wife arrested 10/25/38, tortured; imprisoned until 1945 (!)

20) Fioletov (p. 240) 1---Executed (by the British, 1918)

21) Litvin-Sedoi (p. 241) 3---Survived (assumed; no WP profile); died 1947

22) Urvantsev (p. 241) 3---Survived; died 1985

23) Kirov (p. 241) 1---"The Soviet JFK"; assassinated 1934

24) Fedoseyev (p. 241) 3---Survived (assumed; no WP profile); year deceased?

25) Shtern (p. 241) 3---"Voluntarily emigrated to the Soviet Union out of ideological conviction in 1925." The sole survivor of a mass arrest & eventual massacre (see Lozovsky); died 1968.

26) Lozovsky (p. 242) 1---Executed 08/12/1952, the "Night of the Murdered Poets" Lubyanka prison

27) Molotov, Polina (p. 242) 3---Survived; wife of Vyacheslav; arrested; Gulag; died 1970

28) Ter-Petrosyan (p. 242) 2---Probable murder (prolific "auto accidents" suspected or proven to be assassinations); died 1922

29) Gamarnik (p. 242) 1---Suicide 1937 (to avoid arrest, torture & execution)

30) Reed (p. 242) 3---American journalist (died 1920; not persecuted)

31) Yezhov (p. 242) 1---Executed; wife suicide (11/19/38)

32) Radchenko (p. 243) 3---Year ousted (1937) notable, but listed as a survivor due to lack of information. Died 1942

33) Chkheidze (p. 243) 1---Suicide (a refugee in France; 1926)

34) Krasin (p. 243) 3---Survived (died of natural causes 1926); "Name erased from Communist Party's history" "during the Great Purge"

35) Fotiyeva (p. 243) 3---Probable survivor; year deceased unknown

36) Andreyev (p. 243) 3---Survived; died 1971

37) Litvinov (p. 243) 2---"Auto accident" 12/31/51

38) Pletnyov (p. 244) 2---Fate unknown; due to fatality rates, probably died in prison

39) Levin (p. 244) 1---Executed 1938

40) Eikhe (p. 244) 1---Executed 1940

41) Karmen (p. 244) 3---Survived; died 1978

42) Simonov (p. 244) 3---Survived; died 1979

43) Akhmatova (p. 244) 3---Survived; 1st & 3rd husbands executed

44) Gumilov (p. 244) 1---Executed 1921; also sp. "Gumilev."

45) Khodasevech (p. 245) 3---Survived; died 1939

46) Zhdanov (p. 245) 3---Survived; died 1948

47) Mikhoels (p. 245) 1---Assassinated (yet another "auto accident") 01/13/1948

48) Timashuk (p. 245) 3---Survived; year deceased unknown

49) Poskrebyshev (p. 245) 3---Survived; "1891-1966"; WP died 01/03/1965

50) Abakumov (p. 246) 1---Executed 12/19/54

51) Novikov (p. 245) 3---Survived; died 1976

52) Yevreinov (p. 245) 3---Survived; died 1953 (after emigrating from Russia, also spelt, "Evreinov")

53) Bedny (p. 245) 3---Survived; died 1945

54) Serov (p. 245) 3---"1865-1922"; WP died 1911 (not persecuted)

55) Zetkin (p. 245) 3---Survived (German Communist party; resided in Russia & then left long before the 1930s mass purges; not persecuted)

56) Thaelmann (p. 245) 1---Shot by Nazis (1944)

57) Menzhinsky (p. 245) 3---Survived; died 1934 --- The last man on this list died of natural causes, but his death was later used as a justification for murdering Genrikh Yagoda (NKVD chief, 1934-36; executed 03/15/1938).

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