



# Forty Autumns: A Family's Story of Courage and Survival on Both Sides of the Berlin Wall

*Nina Willner*

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**Forty Autumns: A Family's Story of Courage and Survival on Both Sides of the Berlin Wall** Nina Willner

In this illuminating and deeply moving memoir, a former American military intelligence officer goes beyond traditional Cold War espionage tales to tell the true story of her family—of five women separated by the Iron Curtain for more than forty years, and their miraculous reunion after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

*Forty Autumns* makes visceral the pain and longing of one family forced to live apart in a world divided by two. At twenty, Hanna escaped from East to West Germany. But the price of freedom—leaving behind her parents, eight siblings, and family home—was heartbreaking. Uprooted, Hanna eventually moved to America, where she settled down with her husband and had children of her own.

Growing up near Washington, D.C., Hanna's daughter, Nina Willner became the first female Army Intelligence Officer to lead sensitive intelligence operations in East Berlin at the height of the Cold War. Though only a few miles separated American Nina and her German relatives—grandmother Oma, Aunt Heidi, and cousin, Cordula, a member of the East German Olympic training team—a bitter political war kept them apart.

In *Forty Autumns*, Nina recounts her family's story—five ordinary lives buffeted by circumstances beyond their control. She takes us deep into the tumultuous and terrifying world of East Germany under Communist rule, revealing both the cruel reality her relatives endured and her own experiences as an intelligence officer, running secret operations behind the Berlin Wall that put her life at risk.

A personal look at a tenuous era that divided a city and a nation, and continues to haunt us, *Forty Autumns* is an intimate and beautifully written story of courage, resilience, and love—of five women whose spirits could not be broken, and who fought to preserve what matters most: family.

*Forty Autumns* is illustrated with dozens of black-and-white and color photographs.

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