



Rifke an Improbable Life

Sharp Rosalie Wise

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In this memoir, the author casts a wry and self-deprecating look back on her childhood, with anecdotes about the chance events and comic ironies that make up a life. Rifke (Rosalie Wise Sharp) grew up in North Toronto, which felt to her like a foreign place because there were no other Jewish families there in the late 1930s. Yiddish was spoken in her household, and the food, dress, and customs of Ozarow—the Polish *shtetl* (small Jewish town) from which her parents emigrated—were all maintained. Rifke's peers took lessons in tap dancing, ice skating, the piano, and the flute—activities that didn't translate into the Yiddish vocabulary, where only hard work, no-nonsense, and book learning were permitted. Rifke secretly decided to pass as a gentile, joining a bible class and the Christmas choir, and she was guilty about her pursuit of these activities during the war, when her mother was frantic with fear that their family in Poland was being slaughtered by the Nazis. In high school, Rifke's life changed: it was there that she met and married her soul mate Isadore, who worked in the construction business, much to her parents' disappointment. Prosperity took time, however, and Isadore's audacious dream to build a world-class hotel chain, The Four Seasons, came to pass.

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