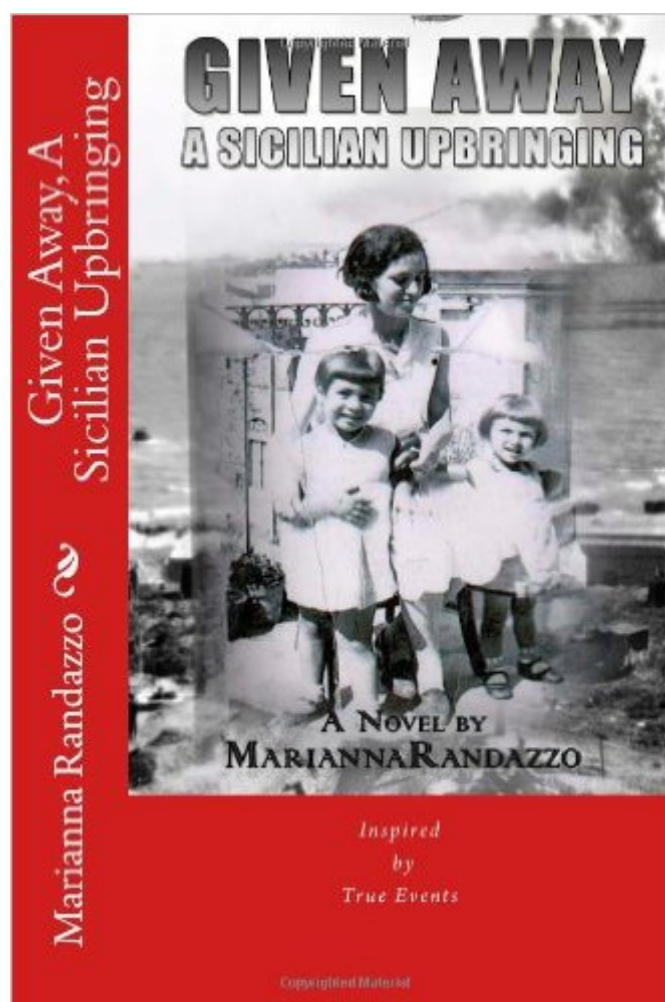


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Given Away: A Sicilian Upbringing



Synopsis

In Sicily, 1935 a four-year child walks away from her loving family, her mother, her sister and an infant brother, with a great-aunt for a vacation. She spends the next eight years of her life absent from their lives. It was not an abduction nor was it an adoption. Tina lives in a one-room house in one of the poorest regions of Sicily. She sleeps between a loving aunt and a deranged uncle. She shares her breakfast with goats and chickens while living in the shadow of fascism. The child grows up while WW II ravages the town. Her school is taken over by German soldiers and the things like bread and eggs that were once plentiful, no longer exist. Less than 25 kilometers away her family leads a very different life. After eight years, she returns home to find her childhood interrupted again. This time sickness, warfare and destruction are her enemies. In wartime Europe, childhood does not exist. The child witnesses and experiences many disturbing things from her uncouth, unsanitary living conditions to the failed paratroopers dangling from trees during the allied invasion. Tina is a survivor. She is able to forgive those who took so much away from her. Her spirit trumps over adversity during the war times within and around her. As she grows older, she struggles to keep the harsh realities of World War II and abandonment at a distance through her sense of humor, imagination and determination. By the age of 15, her fate is sealed, again, without her permission. To gain passage to America she must accept the role as a war bride. A tyrannical, overbearing, bootlegging aunt in America arranges the match. Tina must live under her roof and her rules until her citizenship is secure. Tina has earned the right to complain, yet at no point does she play the victim. At times, her nonjudgmental stance is disquieting. Despite circumstances that could be categorized as abusive and undeniably negligent. Tina respects her parent's decisions and sacrifices herself for the greater good "even when it is not apparent to her. Despite a raging war, Tina thinks about her family and her friends more than about the horrors of the battle fought across the continents, even when she is a victim of the German soldiers' mockery and the American soldier's unusual ways. She is remarkably clever and insightful. The plot and setting are true to life in the period of the past. It will bring the history of war torn Europe to life, providing us a lens upon our collective past that define our unique lives. Tina triumphs against all odds with an unconditional love for a family that despite its profound flaws gave her the fortitude to carve out a successful life on her own terms. *Given Away, A Sicilian Upbringing*, demonstrates that even in the midst of the most horrendous conditions of war, without trivializing the historical tragedy, perseverance prevails as Tina declares what is rightfully hers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sicily, 1935: Sarina, a young woman with three children, gives up her young daughter Tina to her aunt Vittoria, who lives in a different town, with no apparent explanation. The child, just four, at first is intrigued by the move, which she believes to be a summer vacation, but slowly reality settles in and her journey into abandonment begins. "Given Away, A Sicilian Upbringing" is the chronicle of a lost childhood, written with a tight, journalistic style, reminiscent of a diary; and of the diary it also has the structure, having 97 chapters that are but glimpses into particular events of Tina's life from kindergarten to adolescence to her final trip to America at sixteen, as a promised bride. This division into small chapters, which normally would irritate the reader, is actually successful in portraying the developments of her life seen almost as snapshots or frames from a movie. I laud the author, Marianna Randazzo, for such an unusual choice. The constant throughout the book is the feeling of being rejected and the deprivations that living with the aunt are every day's norm. The arrival of the war certainly does not bring any more comforts and Tina realizes that her stay with Vittoria is a stable one. The aunt loves her deeply, just as she loved her mom Sarina, and uses every occasion to show her, so she is not shortchanged in that aspect, but the awareness of being left behind by her own family and the resentment of not knowing why, always double guessing the reasons behind such a dramatic move, permeate the book. The brutish attitude of Tina's uncle, who constantly physically abuses his wife, adds ever more to the internal struggle that Tina undergoes. The war is also a protagonist and Ms.

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