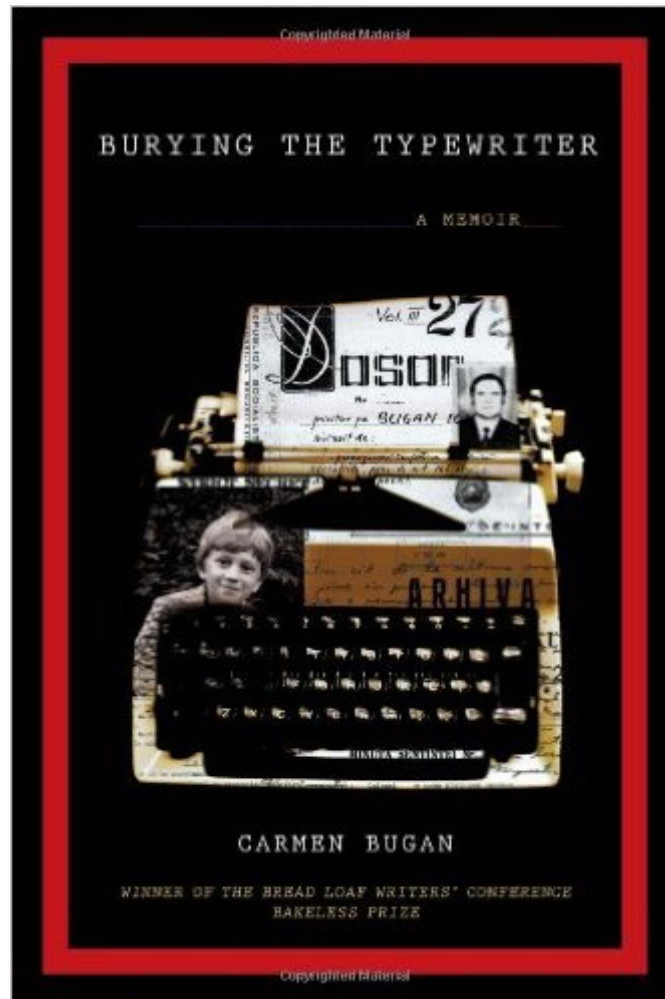


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Burying The Typewriter: A Memoir



Synopsis

Finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, August 2013
Finalist for the George Orwell Prize for Political Writing, April 2013 (UK)
Winner of the Bakeless Prize for Nonfiction, a childhood memoir of political oppression and persecution during Romania's Ceausescu years
Carmen Bugan grew up amid the bounty of the Romanian countryside on her grandparent's farm where food and laughter were plentiful. But eventually her father's behavior was too disturbing to ignore. He wept when listening to Radio Free Europe, hid pamphlets in sacks of dried beans, and mysteriously buried and reburied a typewriter. When she discovered he was a political dissident she became anxious for him to conform. However, with her mother in the hospital and her sister at boarding school, she was alone, and helpless to stop him from driving off on one last, desperate protest. After her father's subsequent imprisonment, Bugan was shunned by her peers at school and informed on by her neighbors. She candidly struggled with the tensions of loving her "hero" father who caused the family so much pain. When he returned from prison and the family was put under house arrest, the Bugans were forced to chart a new course for the future. A warm and intelligent debut, *Burying the Typewriter* provides a poignant reminder of a dramatic moment in Eastern European history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are many reasons to read Carmen Bugan's compelling memoir about her family life during the communist regime of Nicolai Ceausescu (1965-1989). Her vivid memories in rural Romania play in the mind like small films streaming from a happy childhood. Fearlessly grounded grandparents

and voices from the pages of beloved books remind us that poetic spirits unfold from unexpected sources. The honesty and sensitivity with which she confronts the cost of her father's choices sets an admirable example for how to write about those we love. And the quiet tribute to her mother embedded in these pages enlarges the ways we might think about "women's liberation" in a global context. These themes could be the "stuff" of any other coming-of-age memoir. There is even a "first love" that helps to universalize Bagan's narrative. What sets this book apart is the context of surveillance, deprivation, and terror imposed by Ceausescu's secret police (the "Securitate"). As the family sleeps together in their clothes, just in case there is some sort of disturbance in the night, Bagan's early years are transformed by this book into a revelation of two "secrets" that even the Securitate could never have discovered, much less understand. On one hand, the young girls' journey at the heart of the story reveals how loss of innocence feels in beautifully unadorned prose. The deeper secrets are harder to unravel and eventually become a quest of reconciliation with a hidden past. This "book within the book" is an act of bearing witness, of unmasking the masquerade of a brutal totalitarian regime. In comparison to the "coming-of-age journey," this other journey can only begin to find a destination years after the Bagan family emigrates to Michigan in 1989.

WARNING: SOME READERS MAY FEEL THIS REVIEW GIVES AWAY TOO MUCH OF THE STORY. IT CANNOT CONVEY, HOWEVER, THE WONDERFUL WAY IN WHICH IT IS TOLD, AND ONLY A FRACTION OF WHAT THE FAMILY HAD TO ENDURE. Of the many accounts of life under a tyrannical regime, this is one of the very best and one of the most moving. Carmen was born in 1970 in Ceausescu's Romania; but her first six years are idyllic. Her rather severe parents, Ion and Mioara, ran a grocer's shop, from early morning till late in the evening, in a little town some 15 kilometers from their home village, and during the week her much more indulgent maternal grandparents looked after her and her younger sister Loredana on their small farm. They adored their grandparents, of whom Carmen paints a loving picture, as she also does of her paternal grandmother. Her response to the beauties of nature never desert her even in the hard times to come, and her memories of childhood are full of happy descriptions of what every season had to offer in fauna and flora, in scents and in foods, of religious festivals, of folk myths and of beautiful rituals of charity by which the villagers believe they are storing up blessings for themselves in a heaven which they visualize in very concrete terms - communist propaganda notwithstanding. There is a charming innocence about these scenes, for at the time the children do not yet know that Ion had already been in prison once, sentenced in 1961 to seven years for protesting against the communist regime. The first hint that the world is grim comes about a third of the way through the

book, when Carmen is about eleven and when the children become aware of food-shortages, the corruption associated with it, the government's campaign against hoarders.

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