

# reader Views

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## **The Comfort Bearer**

Cathy L. Patrenos

TouchPoint Press (2021)

ISBN: 978-1-9528-1647-5

Reviewed by Amy Lignor for Reader Views (02/2022)

My mother was a career librarian who read it all. However, anything (and I mean, anything) about or set in the WWII period was her absolute favorite reading material. I followed her mindset in this and truly believed that I had read everything about WWII—the various points of view, paths taken, stories told regarding all other countries and people who had to fight against that tyranny—that had been written. Yet, when this tale came to me, I realized perhaps I had just scratched the surface of this time period, because this book by Cathy Patrenos is one of the most captivating, dramatic and almost... beautiful stories about a protagonist during WWII that I've ever read.

This extremely well-researched book focuses on the Japanese occupancy of Manchuria. Here, we meet a Korean girl named Soon Ja who, quite literally, experiences a life that is turned upside-down and inside-out. Her journey takes 360 degree turns, like a roller-coaster – going from a life of peace and innocence to one that involves being a sex slave for the evil cruelty that the Imperial Japanese Army forces upon her.

The author takes us to the brink of madness; WWII is just about to begin, and Soon Ja is just 16 when she is trapped in the biggest human trafficking conspiracy of the 20th century. Ripped from her home in occupied Korea, Soon Ja finds herself in Manchuria. Her job? She must be a “comfort woman” to the military. At one point, she must even become a general's war toy and deal with a man who exhibits no heart or soul whatsoever. To give her a slice of retaliation against the demons who bring about her physical and mental pain each and every day, she takes to spying for the resistance. Unfortunately, when those good people who are trying to change things are defeated, the reader feels as if Soon Ja will finally be defeated as well. Thankfully, she is not. In fact, as the war churns on year after year, Soon Ja builds up her own resistance; a strength that is almost impossible to understand or believe in considering the amount of horror she's had to sustain.

Uniquely written in first-person, the author allows all readers to see and feel the world during that time period, going far above the normal non-fiction works that read more like encyclopedias.

For someone like myself, who did not fully understand this particular facet of WWII, I was also amazed, bewildered and sickened to know that these “comfort women” are still a topic of debate in my lifetime because it is still happening. There are even memorials placed across the globe honoring these women; and they will continue to be placed seeing as that human trafficking still makes a multi-billion-dollar profit in 2021.

I thank this author for doing all the interviews she did to create this book. But, most of all, I thank her for the creation of Soon Ja from the women she met and spoke to. This is a girl-turned-woman who still had that fight – that slice of optimism and hope in a world that was truly hopeless. All I can say is, I wish my mom was still around to read this one; she would have been this author's biggest fan. 5 Stars!