



In the Unlikeliest of Places

How Nachman Libeskind Survived the Nazis, Gulags, and Soviet Communism

Annette Libeskind Berkovits
Foreword by Daniel Libeskind

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This is a beautifully written saga of a Jewish family before, during, and after World War II. The Holocaust must never be forgotten. The historical value of survivor testimonies is important to preserving the collective memory of humanity.

– **Hanna Davidson Pankowsky**, author of *East of the Storm: Outrunning the Holocaust in Russia* (1998)

This is a book that works on so many levels: as the biography of a Polish Jew who narrowly escapes two murderous totalitarian systems, as a personal journey that leads to a new life in the United States marked by optimism and accomplishment—and, above all, as the beautiful, heartfelt tribute of a daughter to her remarkable father.

– **Andrew Nagorski**, author of *Hitlerland: American Eyewitnesses to the Nazi Rise to Power* (2012)

The deeper I went into *In the Unlikeliest of Places* the more I found my eyes tearing up—not from the suffering of victims of the Holocaust but from the beauty of the extraordinary courage and success of Nachman Libeskind. It is, of course, the success of a whole family, a whole people refusing to accept defeat, but it's especially the defiance and joy in his spirit that is so moving. When he goes to Berlin to see the Jewish Museum, designed by his son, Daniel Libeskind, and when he takes up painting in his eighties, not as an old man's busywork but with craft, power, verve, and a brilliant sense of color and composition—those victories moved me more than any recent book on the Holocaust and survival. That man! You're going to love him and love the people who supported and believed in him, especially his wife Dora and his children—Annette and Daniel—and his grandchildren.

– **John J. Clayton**, author of *Many Seconds into the Future* (2014) and *Mitzvah Man* (2011)

Annette Libeskind Berkovits was born in Kyrgyzstan and grew up in postwar Poland and the fledgling state of Israel before coming to America at age sixteen. In her three-decade career with the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York, she spearheaded the institution's nationwide and worldwide science education programs. Her achievements include the first-ever agreement to bring environmental education to China's schools. The National Science Foundation has recognized her outstanding leadership in the field.

Daniel Libeskind is an internationally renowned architect, known for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and the Dublin Performing Arts Center in Ireland. His practice is designing commercial, residential, and cultural buildings around the world. His Master Plan for rebuilding the World Trade Center site in New York City was selected in 2003 and has served as the blueprint for the entire site, including the Freedom Tower, the Memorial, the Museum, and the PATH Terminal.

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In 2004, three years after her father's death, Annette Berkovits was going through his things and found a box of tapes—several years' worth—recounting his spectacular life, triumphs, and tragedies one last time in his baritone voice. Nachman Libeskind's remarkable story is an odyssey through crucial events of the twentieth century.

With an unshakable will and a few drops of luck, he survives a pre-war Polish prison; witnesses the 1939 Nazi invasion of Lodz and narrowly escapes; is imprisoned in a brutal Soviet gulag where he helps his fellow inmates survive, and upon regaining his freedom treks to the foothills of the Himalayas, where he finds and nearly loses the love of his life. Later, the crushing communist regime and a lingering postwar anti-Semitism in Poland drive Nachman and his young family to Israel, where he faces a new form of discrimination. Then, defiantly, Nachman turns a pocketful of change into a new life in New York City, where a heartbreaking promise leads to his unlikely success as a modernist painter that inspires others to pursue their dreams.

With just a box of tapes, Annette Libeskind Berkovits tells more than her father's story: she builds an uncommon family saga and reimagines a turbulent past. In the process she uncovers a stubborn optimism that flourished in the unlikeliest of places.



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