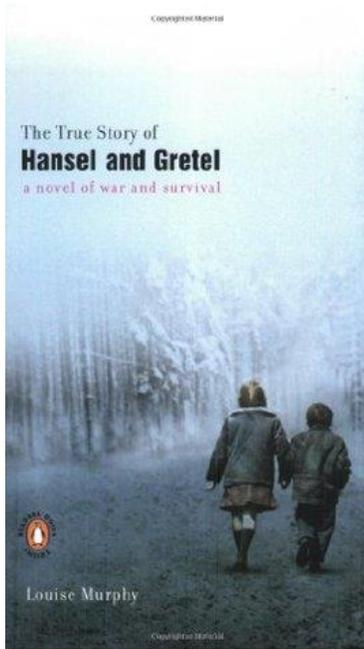


## ***The True Story of Hansel and Gretel: A Novel of War and Survival***

By Louise Murphy  
(Penguin Books, 2003)  
297 pages



It is rare that a book surprises me. This one most certainly did. I thought I knew what I was getting when I pick up this gem at our local Sam's Club but what I got was so much more than my expectation.

The publisher makes this note in the publishing information at the beginning of the book: "In this novel, Louise Murphy uses the art of fiction to cast new light on the horrifying facts of the Holocaust." She certainly does that.

In the first place, this book is an incredible work of fiction. In my reading, a good fiction book makes me care about the characters, causes my heart to race when the action of the story becomes intense and compels me to read further when I have already invested a great deal of time reading.

Murphy's book meets the hallmarks of great fiction for me.

The publisher also says that this book discusses the horrifying facts of the Holocaust. I have been a reader of Holocaust literature for the last decade, and this book certainly presents the stories and issues of the Holocaust in a different kind of light. Rather than a factual recounting, in a non-impassioned way (like many historical books do), this piece of literature puts the images of the Holocaust in the story engulfing the characters of the book.

There are intense scenes recounted in the book – scenes that if you are unfamiliar with the horrors of war may be shocking and very disturbing. Even if you are familiar with the stories emanating from the Holocaust, the situations depicted in the book happen to characters that you have become invested. I found myself rooting for them and hoping different things would happen. I felt in the reading some shock, surprise, and sadness when some things happened (which I won't spoil for you in this description). Suffice it to say, Murphy has written a story that captures the imagination, causes the reading to connect with the characters and shocks the sensibilities with the horrific tragedy of Holocaust.

Murphy takes the basic structure of the fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel and sets it in the context of Poland of the mid-1940's during the battle between Russia and Nazi Germany. The story of the two children, set in the context of the retreating German army through Poland and the coming Russian invasion, is vivid, compelling and taps into a yearning and a hopeful heart.

The book forced me to think. The book compelled me to feel things that were surprising. The book made me reflect on the horror of the Holocaust and made me have a glimmer of hope that we would never live through an experience this dark again.