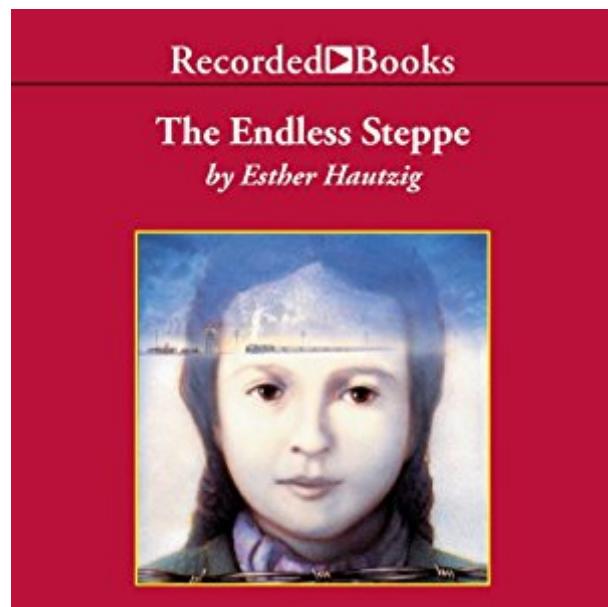


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# The Endless Steppe: Growing Up In Siberia



## **Synopsis**

Exiled to Siberia In June 1942, the Rudomin family is arrested by the Russians. They are "capitalists -- enemies of the people." Forced from their home and friends in Vilna, Poland, they are herded into crowded cattle cars. Their destination: the endless steppe of Siberia. For five years, Ester and her family live in exile, weeding potato fields and working in the mines, struggling for enough food and clothing to stay alive. Only the strength of family sustains them and gives them hope for the future.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Esther's wonderfully sincere and illustrative writing will hold even an adult's attention from cover to cover. I have read it over and over again for the last 22 years. As a child in 1979 at age 11, I found myself in my family's frozen garden pretending to be Esther herself, wandering through Siberia in search of frozen potatoes. When I would take a bath, after playing in the snow and getting chilled, I would revel in the marvelous heat of the water and imagine I had just been given a rare cake of soap. When thirsty, I would make myself wait for a drink of cool water from the tap until my throat was parched, so that the first drip of water on my tongue would be heavenly. I would then suck the water into my cheeks as Esther did and swallow very slowly, trying to make it last. My younger sister and I would walk into my dad's livestock truck and pretend we were on a cattle car headed for the Steppe, and we would make a makeshift hut under a log fort we had near the barnyard. Esther's life story filled my thoughts, my days and my head for years following, and reminded me to always care for others and not to take my life in rural United States for granted. Esther wrote in a way that made

me feel as if I had somehow managed to form a personal friendship with her. In 1995, I was able to speak with Esther on the phone, and I have never forgotten that wonderful conversation. Talking with her (she still has a very noticeable accent) was as if the book itself came to life, because I realized I was actually visiting with the woman who was the courageous child in the book. Esther's writing encouraged me to be thankful, to be grateful, to be kind, and to never give up. I majored in journalism in college, and though I have never had such an extreme happening in my lifetime, I hope to eventually put down in words something that will touch other's lives as Esther Hautzig touched mine.

Here in America, when someone mentions the atrocities of World War II, most people think immediately of the Holocaust and Hitler's plan to rid the world of Jews and establish the German "master race". However, Hitler was not the only one during this time committing atrocities which killed millions of people. The Soviets were guilty of this as well, though this is not as well known to Americans. This is the story of a young girl who is a victim of the Soviet forced-labor camps. Her family did nothing wrong, but with the Russian invasion of Poland, her parents and grandparents were considered "capitalists" and therefore deported to Siberia. This book is very well written. The characters are very well developed, which is especially important since this book is autobiographical. Reading this gives a real sense of how far out in the middle of nowhere these people were. There is the beauty of this pristine land versus the terror which haunts the people who have been sent here, as well as the true desolation of the place. In time, Esther, who is 15 by the end of the book, really feels that this is the place her life is, rather than Poland, where she lived before, even though this is the place of her imprisonment. Hautzig also does a good job of describing the constant suffering and scrabbling for humanity that these people went through as political prisoners. It was a hopeless situation, but the one thing that they could least give up was hope. This is one of the very few children's (or young adult) books that does focus on what was happening in the Soviet Union during this time. There are many kids books which focus on the Germans and the Holocaust, but that was only part of the story, and to forget the rest of these people who suffered and died because of the same sort of tyranny is an affront to them.

Like many other reviewers here, I discovered this book at the age of 8, during the 1970s and have re-read it many times since. When I moved to New York in the early 1990s I found myself living only a few blocks from Esther Hautzig, and actually met her daughter once in a store. I had to tell her that her mother's book was one of the most memorable I had read as a child - and I was a

bookworm who consumed a minimum of four books per week. Several years ago I discovered another book by Ms. Hautzig, "Remember Who You Are" - a series of autobiographical stories, written for adults; many of these stories tell what happened to the people the reader first met in "The Endless Steppe". I was fascinated to learn, for example, that Miss Rachel - Esther's governess in Vilna - was also sent to Siberia and one day took the risk of illegally hitching a ride (during that time in the USSR one needed permission to travel internally from the local commissar; failure to do so could result in imprisonment or worse) from the village where she was living to Esther's village, showing up totally unexpectedly. (Miss Rachel now lives in Israel.) Evidently Ms. Hautzig's editors advised her to leave that incident out of "The Endless Steppe" because readers would not find it believable. Also related in this collection is the fate of Esther's beloved cousin, Salek, in the Vilna ghetto, and the heartbreaking deaths of her maternal grandmother and her favourite aunt at Ponar. At any rate, I advise any parent who wishes to give his/her child a book to be cherished and re-read, a book about the strength and importance of the family, about a place and time that is rapidly fading into history, to buy this book. And for the adult who read and loved "The Endless Steppe" as a child, try to find "Remember Who You Are" at the library as I believe it is out of print.

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