



# How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed

By Slavenka Drakulic

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This essay collection from renowned journalist and novelist Slavenka Drakulic, which quickly became a modern (and feminist) classic, draws back the Iron Curtain for a glimpse at the lives of Eastern European women under Communist regimes. Provocative, often witty, and always intensely personal, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* cracks open a paradoxical world that through its rejection of capitalism and commoditization ends up fetishizing both.

Examining the relationship between material goods and expressions of happiness and individuality in a society where even bananas were an alien luxury, Drakulic homes in on the eradication of female identity, drawing on her own experiences as well as broader cultural observations. Enforced communal housing that allowed for little privacy, the banishment of many time-saving devices, and a focus on manual labor left no room for such bourgeois affectations as cosmetics or clothes, but Drakulic's remarkable exploration of the reality behind the rhetoric reveals that women still went to desperate lengths to feel "feminine."

*How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* also chronicles the lingering consequences of such regimes. The Berlin Wall may have fallen, but Drakulic's power pieces testify that ideology cannot be dismantled so quickly; a lifetime lived in fear cannot be so easily forgotten.

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## How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed By Slavenka Drakulic Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #51808 in Books
- Brand: Harper Perennial
- Published on: 2016-06-07
- Released on: 2016-06-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .50" w x 5.31" l, .38 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 224 pages

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### Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Drakulic's fine collection of essays draws strength from her keen powers of observation and sensitivity to her readers' interests. Her achievement is to depict the starkly common identity of everyday life in socialist Eastern Europe before its unlamented loss becomes irretrievable. It is a world in which party authority can create the "sudden invisibility" for an offending journalist, where public buildings share a "shabbiness and color of sepia," and one that makes the post office an impenetrable "institution of power." The essays are also about people, about the obsessive "communist eye" (*italics original*) disturbed by the injustice of New York's homeless yet neurotically envious of those wearing fur coats at home. The tragic irony lies in the book's title. Hoarding material objects enabled people "to survive communism," but hoarding wartime memories and the inability to "let the dead be dead" may destroy the author's native Yugoslavia.

Recommended for all public and academic libraries.

- Zachary T. Irwin, *Pennsylvania State Univ.-Erie*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A poignant and truthful look at what living under Communism was really like, by Croatian journalist and novelist Drakuli. The author, daughter of a former partisan who was a high-ranking Communist army officer, was never a member of the Party herself. Here, she conveys the reality of life under Communism through ordinary but telling detail: the wonder of a man who, for the first time in his life, was able to eat a banana--and ate it skin and all, marveling at its texture; Drakuli's own bewilderment at finding fresh strawberries in N.Y.C. in December; the feel of the quality of the paper in an issue of *Vogue*; the desperate lengths to which women under the Communist regime would go to find cosmetics or clothes or something that would make them feel feminine in a society where such a feeling was regarded as a bourgeois affectation. Drakuli dismisses the argument that Western manufacturers have manipulated these needs: "To tell us that they are making a profit by exploiting our needs is like warning a Bangladeshi about cholesterol." Though herself a feminist, she willingly turns amusing in describing the uncomprehending questions sent to her by a New York editor who asked about the role of feminism in political discourse in Eastern Europe, when there was no political discourse and when feminists were--and apparently still are--regarded as enemies of the people. "We may have survived Communism," Drakuli writes, "but we have not yet outlived it." To the author, Communism is more than an ideology or a method of government--it is a state of mind that is yet to be erased from the collective consciousness of those who have lived under it. A sometimes sad, sometimes witty book that conveys more about politics in Eastern Europe than any number of theoretical political analyses. -- Copyright ©1992, *Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

"She is a writer and journalist whose voice belongs to the world." (Gloria Steinem)

"A thoughtful, beautifully written collection of essays...blending provocative analysis with the texture of everyday life." (*New York Times Book Review*)

"An invaluable account of the cumulative weariness of the soul brought on by daily life in an Eastern European country." (Vivian Gornick, critic and essayist (National Book Award nominee))

"Seldom has such a narrative been so spirited and immediate." (Christopher Hitchens)

“Not only the first ever grassroots feminist critique of communism, it’s one of our first glimpses into real peoples’ lives in pre–revolutionary Eastern Europe. My world is twice as large as it was before I read this book.... [Drakulic] is a brave, funny, wise and wonderfully gifted writer.” (*New York Times*-bestselling author Barbara Ehrenreich)

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Jackie Sneller:**

This *How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed* is great book for you because the content which can be full of information for you who all always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. That book reveal it details accurately using great plan word or we can declare no rambling sentences inside. So if you are read this hurriedly you can have whole info in it. Doesn't mean it only provides straight forward sentences but difficult core information with wonderful delivering sentences. Having *How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed* in your hand like keeping the world in your arm, information in it is not ridiculous one. We can say that no publication that offer you world in ten or fifteen moment right but this e-book already do that. So , this is certainly good reading book. Hey Mr. and Mrs. hectic do you still doubt which?

#### **Ashley Williams:**

The book untitled *How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed* contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains your ex idea with easy method. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do not really worry, you can easy to read it. The book was authored by famous author. The author provides you in the new time of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can keep reading your smart phone, or device, so you can read the book in anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice learn.

#### **Soledad Neeley:**

Is it anyone who having spare time then spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just telling lies on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This *How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed* can be the reply, oh how comes? A book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your time by reading in this fresh era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

#### **Gloria Lafreniere:**

Reading a book make you to get more knowledge from it. You can take knowledge and information from a book. Book is published or printed or outlined from each source which filled update of news. In this modern era like right now, many ways to get information are available for anyone. From media social such as newspaper, magazines, science e-book, encyclopedia, reference book, book and comic. You can add your understanding by that book. Isn't it time to spend your spare time to spread out your book? Or just seeking

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