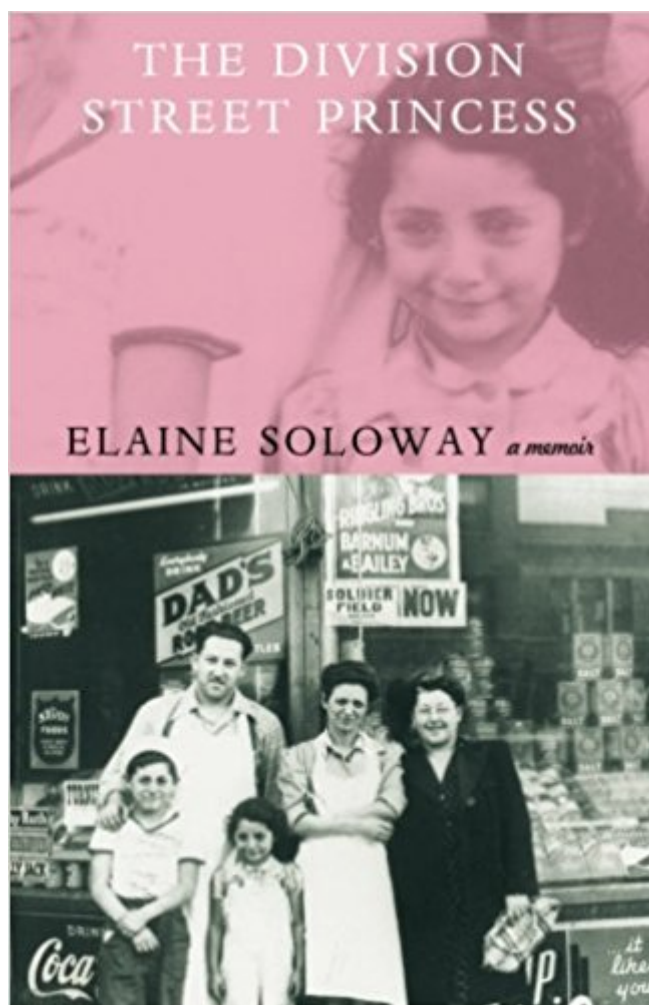


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# The Division Street Princess: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Set in the 1940s, Elaine Soloway's memoir takes its title from the street that Studs Terkel exalts in his classic book, "Division Street: America" and from the pet name her father gave her. Soloway lived in a three-room flat above her family's grocery store. In her tale of bookies, poolrooms, sidewalk playgrounds, and relatives who lived down the block, we learn about her loving but embattled parents, her adored older brother, and neighborhood kibitzers. Along with her recollections of a lively, unique community, she also shows the underside of childhood and urban life. Although far from the Holocaust and the war overseas, Soloway faced dangers close to home when a child her age was horribly murdered, and when predators preyed on voiceless little girls. As Soloway struggled to find her own identity, the family store and Division Street waged battles too: for post-war prosperity, television, supermarkets, and suburbia threatened an end to corner stores and to old neighborhoods everywhere.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Soloway, the daughter of European Jewish immigrants, grew up in a quintessential Chicago neighborhood during and after World War II. Small for her age, bookish, and circumspect, she rarely seemed to please her beautiful, stylish, and hardworking mother but was called "Princess" by her cheerful father, who could not for the life of him control his appetites for fattening foods, cigarettes, and gambling. The family of four lived in cramped quarters above their small grocery store, where they all worked. Soloway's child's-eye view of her ill-matched yet loving parents struggling to rise above poverty and ensure that their children live easier and more fulfilling lives enlivens a classic

immigrant's tale. Simply and gracefully told, Soloway's sweet and lucid memoir affirms the vulnerability and valor of young girls and captures the atmosphere of a striving ethnic community in a rapidly changing city neighborhood. The world Soloway remembers is a microcosm of America, where wave after wave of diverse immigrants enrich our lives. Donna Seaman  
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Elaine Soloway is a public relations consultant and freelance writer and the author of three books: "The Division Street Princess," "She's Not The Type," and "Green Nails and Other Acts of Rebellion: Life After Loss." She also writes The Rookie Caregiver, The Rookie Widow, and The Rookie Transplant blogs. Formerly of Chicago where she once worked as a press aide to former Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne and School Superintendent Ruth Love. Elaine currently lives in Los Angeles. She has two daughters in the entertainment industry. Jill Soloway is the creator of the award-winning "Transparent" on Video, and Faith Soloway is on its writing team. Elaine Soloway has three grandchildren.

I love memoirs and this nostalgic read made me think of my younger days. Though I lived my life much further west than the author, I can relate to so many of the experiences that she and her family lived through. The author's father always called her princess even though they lived in a 3 room apartment and she had to sleep with her brother. Her father always made her feel like a princess. The little family owned a little corner grocery store that let people buy on credit. There is a closeness of the neighbors and their kids playing in the streets while the parents visited on the porches during the summer in the heat of the evening. They were poor people struggling day to day to get by much as our family did. There were some really dark times as well as there are in most people's lives. But it was a very special time. That era is long past and this book brought back some wonderful memories; The good and bad times of years past.

Reminded me of the neighborhood I grew up. It was entertaining.

The Division Street Princess breathes emotion from its pages. A sweet and often bittersweet story set in the 1940s and early 1950s that follows the childhood of its author as she recounts life in a prominently Jewish neighborhood in Chicago. Not sugar-coated like many memoirs, not deathly depressing like Angela's Ashes, The Division Street Princess strikes a balance that rings true. Her parents' imperfect marriage, the imperfect truth of life and failings of men, women, and ideals, and

an undying devotion to family and love - we see all of this and how they impact the life of a child steeped in her own self-doubt, naive views, dreams and hopes. The writing made this reader connect with her, and feel the real and historic events that are part of this tale (with fascinating photos provided) that intersected with her life. Without a soapbox, *The Division Street Princess* gently coaxes us to understand what love and devotion are all about, even when we realize that the people we love fall far short of what our childhood eyes had once envisioned. In bits and pieces, naivete falls away, and we learn the real reasons why we love the people around us. A beautiful, lasting tale crafted by talented hands.

A wonderful memoir of a time gone by. I grew up in Chicago and I loved this. It reminded me the stories my Grandmother told me. But the book is so well written you will enjoy no matter where you were raised.

Author Elaine Soloway remembers Chicago in the 'forties as the best of times and the worst of times. Now in her sixties, she presents an unvarnished, microscopically precise yet warm and loving account of growing up in a supportive Jewish family above her family owned mom and pop grocery store in Chicago's Humboldt Park. The author remembers/reconstructs every detail--how her parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighbors spoke, dressed, worried, loved, and argued--as the world of their Jewish enclave was dissolved by the drip, drip, drip of postwar mobility. She notes, "Television, suburban backyards, and supermarkets were draining our close-knit block of its friendliness, its familiarity." Soloway's excellently written account will bring back the past for those of us who shared the same time and place. For those who did not, it will serve as a valued lesson on how we got from Chicago in the 'forties to the Chicago of today and what we gained and at what cost.--Lowell Streiker author of *The Old Neighborhood: Memories of a Chicago Childhood--1942 to 1952*.

I read *Division Street Princess* and loved every page. Soloway writes wonderfully, and evokes a certain America magically, she has created a very important memoir. I feel the book is so important in Americana culture and Jewish-Americana cultural archives, that the book should eventually be entered onto an online Internet site, free of charge, so that readers in the future, and I mean the FUTURE, like 500 years from now, can also read this moving memoir! Also, this would make a great movie in the Barry Levinson vein of *Hollywoodiana*. The murder of the little girl and the arrest of the murderer would make a fantastic 1950s Chicago movie story, with Soloway's memoir bookending

the movie on both sides.

Elaine Soloway completely overwhelmed me with emotion with *The Division Street Princess*. This book is timeless and touched on every aspect of life with which people are faced, including marriage, mother-daughter relationships, father-daughter relationships, friendships, immigrant issues, brother-sister relationships, extended family dynamics, and more difficult issues like sexual abuse. This book has it all and forced me to think about my own life and how I want to move forward as a wife, mother, daughter and friend. This book will forever have an imprint on my heart and in my mind. Thank you, Elaine Soloway, for sharing your story.

I am not a Soloway but I am crazy about this book! Elaine Soloway transports us to an urban Chicago neighborhood in the 1940s and takes us on a journey through her unique Jewish childhood. I loved every Yiddish inflection, every Chicago reference, and every stop in this remarkable ride through Elaine's loving, poignant, and often challenging world. This book belongs on a shelf with the likes of Vivian Gornick, Annie Dillard, Anne Roiphe, and Elizabeth Ehrlich. Reading about the amazing woman Soloway became in daughter Jill's book "Tiny Ladies in Shiny Pants," I can only hope that Elaine is sequestered in her Chicago home busily working on the sequel to "The Division Street Princess."

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