



Title: Anna’s Christmas: Hidden Truth
Poems
Author: Cheryl Freier
Genre: Historical Fiction

Setting: Slovakia
Pages: 195
Period: World War II

Best Medium for Adaptation:

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Studio Feature Film | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Documentary | <input type="checkbox"/> Drama/Comedy TV series |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independent Feature Film | <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative/reality TV series | <input type="checkbox"/> Children’s TV series |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animation – Feature Film | <input type="checkbox"/> Animation – TV series (adult) | <input type="checkbox"/> Webseries |

Logline

A Jewish family hides in the Slovakian mountains to evade Nazis in World War II, surviving through their mother’s strength and tenacity, as well as the charity of the local Christian community.

Brief Summary

As World War II begins to escalate, Anna Freier and her family narrowly escape being on a train bound for a Jewish prison camp and hide in the outskirts of the village of Micholovce, nestled against the cold and inhospitable Slovakian mountains. The family hides for years, praying to God that the American forces will one day come to fight off the vicious Nazis. Growing ever hungrier and forced to face the coldest winter in memory, the Freiers cling to life by living in a primitively made forest bunker and sustaining themselves on bark and other foliage, what few fish there are in the lake, and the rare rat or squirrel that suddenly appears as a furtive blessing. Anna seems gifted with an ability to see angels and the vibrant, supernatural tapestry that is painted all around them, and though she does not speak much of it and the reader finds themselves asking if these were real events or her own imaginings, it matters little as the faith these sights instill in her helps her family survive impossible hardship. Eventually reaching the brink of starvation, the local Christians of Micholovce devise a plan to deliver food and hope in equal measure, under the guise of their routine Christmas celebration.

Synopsis

Outside of the freezing Slovakian village of Micholovce, ANNA FREIER lives in a rustic emergency bunker near the imposing mountains. A nearby lake is the only consistent source of water – rain and snow melt, or “manna,” as Anna aptly refers to it, is a rare blessing – but food is in particularly short supply. This Jewish family does not have the ability to venture back into



their former town as the Nazi patrols would instantly throw them into a prison camp train: something they only barely managed to evade shortly before the tale begins. The Freiers manage to learn enough about wood lore to keep themselves barely sustained. They learn that scraping and chewing the bark of certain trees can ward off hunger pains for a time, even if they do not provide much nutrition. They become versed in the best times to brave the lake, a dangerous area that offers none of the cover to hide in that the tree line or the cave does.

Most of all, however, the family is reliant on the care packages that the villagers are able to deliver. A great many times they are not able to and the Freiers must go hungry for longer, as the Nazi patrols – as well as secret Nazi sympathizers among the villagers – are incredibly strict and violent, with many townsfolk unable to make pre-arranged drop offs at best, or too terrified to cross them at worst. More than once, Anna must feed on only disappointment over a delivery that never comes.

Her faith also sustains her, as much as it is able to. While it does not provide nourishment it does provide strength of will and courage in the face of supreme adversity. Anna begins to experience what some might term flights of fancy, or possibly hallucinations, due to her extreme hunger. A vivid, lifelike scene unfolds all around her, in which she communicates with nature and the forces of life, and upon its conclusion Anna humorously wonders if she is experiencing a waking dream. Her next vision, however, is filled with far more danger and thus clarity: three angels find themselves hovering over the war-torn countryside, doing what they're able to aid the resistance against the Nazi invaders. Recognizing that Anna can see them, they take her upon their cloud and show her a grander picture of the surrounding terrain and its military forces. Anna is frightened of the sheer force Germany seems poised to exert, yet the experience bolsters her faith and fills in her a sense that her family can survive if they remain prudent, clever and modest in their dealings with the natural world and most certainly with any strangers that manage to get close to their secret bunker. Keeping their heads down is the order of the day.

The nearby Christian church, whose members are still allowed to live within the village, seeks subtle ways to help their Jewish friends in hiding. The courageous PRIEST devises a plan to cook more delicious Christmas food than they need, and deliver in secret to the refugees under cover of their annual celebration and traditional sleigh rides in the surrounding wilderness. Believing this is a good plan, the priest assures his flock that this is a holy mission from God and that they will not be in any danger during that fateful night.

Before that night, however, is another matter entirely: for one of their number is actually a hidden Nazi sympathizer who feels he must alert the Reich to this wayward plan. He attempts to steal the priest's radio and flee, a host of frantic Christians on his heels, but the three angels enchant the radio so that it burns too hot to touch. Now seeking only escape, the sympathizer attempts to cut across the lake but is caught halfway by a fearsome dragon. Perhaps feeling that eating so foul a meal is beneath him, the majestic beast instead creates a massive whirlpool with his flowing body, hurling the terrified sympathizer into its depths before disappearing again beneath now placid waters.

Whether these visions are attributed to actual events or Anna's increasing dance between despair, hope and hunger is portrayed as purposefully vague, to better place the reader in Anna's mindset.



A short while thereafter, she finds herself starkly back in the unforgiving physical world as she suddenly hears voices calling. Anna is overcome with grief and fear – after managing to keep her family safe for so many years, could she really risk calling out to what might well be a trap? At the end of her rope and full of faith in God, however, she summons the courage to call back in return. To her great relief she is soon met by the Christian sleigh drivers and their care packages. Seeing three men, she refers to them as angels, though it is unknown if they represent the same three actual angels depicted previously. They graciously ask if they might all celebrate the holiday season together once the war ends. In due course, a villager eventually seeks them out in the woods to inform them that the war has ended.

Element Ratings

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Development Needed
Concept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Story	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Characters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments/Suggestions for Adaptation

There is always a high demand for movies and television shows focusing on the Second World War, and this is doubly true for those stories that shine a light on the little known pockets of fighting or humanity that have become forgotten amidst the more famous, larger scale elements. *Anna’s Christmas* is an excellent example of this. The setting of Slovakia has barely been touched upon compared to the plights of other countries, and their military contributions to France and Britain are usually not even shown as a footnote.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle *Anna’s Christmas* faces in appealing to an average studio or production company is that the story is not merely a historical and military one, but a religious one. Many Hollywood production houses are hungry for true WWII stories, but more wary of one with angels and magical powers. A distinct possibility is that a studio may wish to buy the rights to the story, but then remove or tone down some of the fantasy elements.

However, the fantasy visuals could also help an adaptation appeal to a wider audience. Of note are the elaborate, dreamlike visions that are often (though not always) ascribed to Anna. Making use of vivid imagery, the book features a joyous tree creature, a cloud vehicle that is able to reform into varied shapes to best accommodate its angel and human passengers, a battle scene with a panther that would make for an exciting shot in the advertising campaign, and a lake dragon that bests a Nazi sympathizer by creating a tumultuous vortex. These visuals are strong, striking and add color and vitality to the cold, oppressive landscape Anna finds herself in, a place and a period where even the fish are “gray” in their own way. Including such visuals would greatly increase the cost of production, so in an adaptation, decisions would have to be made as to whether one wishes for a smaller, more realistic and faithful film, or a broader one that needs to appeal to as many people as possible.



At several points, other books in the Freier saga are mentioned. However they are often not showcased with chronology in mind, and can jump around in time compared to the real events that are unfolding. While this can mean that the reader can sometimes become lost if they have not read these other books, this is something easily handled by a potential screenwriter assigned the work, and if anything, provides increased incentive for a studio to buy the rights to multiple books in the franchise.

Normally, a period piece requires somewhat challenging costuming needs from both the wardrobe department and those extras hired for owning the appropriate attire. Thankfully *Anna* sidesteps all of these concerns as the needs are exceedingly cheap, and thus quite attractive to any studio looking to pick it up. Very few actors would typically be shown, and even those scenes featuring larger groups could be trimmed down without harm to the overall narrative. Those characters that are shown would have meager clothing needs with the additional hodgepodge of hand-me-down clothes and dirty wartime conditions, all blending together to make almost any collection of quasi-period attire work well enough for filming purposes. Anna’s family could often be shown in either dirty clothes, those wet from fishing in the lake, or in the dark of the bunker.

Likewise, a limited travel budget would be required. Some shots would have to be done either in the real village of Micholovce (assuming enough of it still carries the previous aesthetic) or in other European venues. The bunker and major village locations, however, could easily be built by the production crew as long as the mountainous, wooded terrain was a close enough match. Interior locations, of course, could all be sets shot anywhere.

One minor concern to be discussed with all producers would be the seemingly benign question of which *language* to film in. The bulk of World War II shows are filmed from an American or British perspective, due to the large and affluent audience base this combined market represents. When other countries are shown, however, they must make the decision to speak in either accented English or to opt for subtitles, catering to either mass market appeal or culture connoisseurs, to cast a wide net for low-hanging fruit or a more targeted focus to smaller crowds with bigger pocketbooks.

After all is considered, *Anna’s Christmas* offers a unique look into a little known segment of WWII, conveying the sort of small scale, high concept tale that can lead to a quite profitable screen adaptation. While there are a myriad of forms such a production could ultimately take, it is safe to say that any number of them would highlight the Freier family and their heroic struggle in the most positive of light.

<i>Final Recommendation</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Consider
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Consider
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider with Development