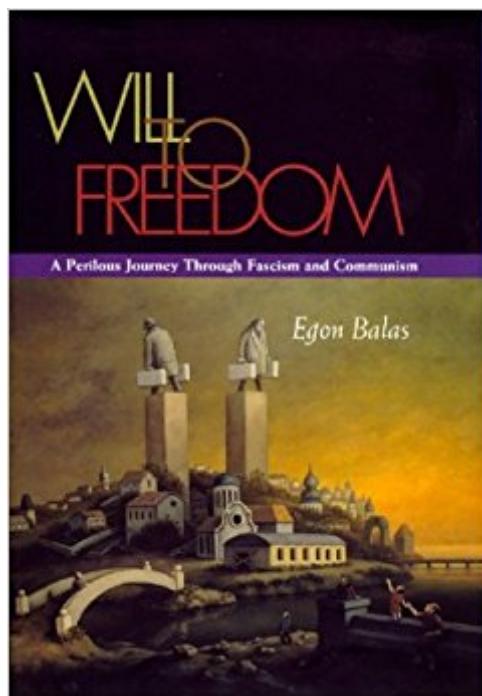


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# Will To Freedom: A Perilous Journey Through Fascism And Communism



## **Synopsis**

Will to Freedom is an eyewitness account of the social and political upheaval that shook Eastern Europe from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s. As an underground resistance fighter, political prisoner, fugitive, and Communist Party official, Egon Balas charts his journey from idealistic young Communist to disenchanted dissident. Attracted by its anti-Nazi stance, Balas joined the Hungarian Communist Party in 1942, after Hungary had entered the war on Hitler's side. He helped organize work stoppages and distributed antiwar leaflets. In his memoir, he offers a compelling account first of his eventual imprisonment and ordeal under torture and then of his escape and life in hiding.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Deeply moving, rich with information and insight." - Elie Wiesel" --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

"Deeply moving, rich with information and insight." - Elie Wiesel "Egon Balas recalls all that happened in vivid detail - their names, the places, the underground resisters, the enemy collaborators, the narrow escapes, the tortures, the betrayals, and forced confessions. The few who, by a quirk of fate, survived." - George B. Dantzig, Stanford University "A welcome reminder that a highly intelligent, stubbornly courageous, and lucky human spirit will sometimes prevail over baneful forces." - Herbert A. Simon, Carnegie Mellon University "[Balas] takes the reader from his Transylvanian school years and early Communist commitment through a fascist prison in Budapest

to imprisonment in a Romanian Communist prison, all the way to a brilliant academic career in the United States. Few writers have discussed more dramatically what it meant to be a political idealist of Jewish background in the turmoils of Nazism and Stalinism in East Central Europe." - Istvan Deak, Seth Low Professor of History, Columbia University

If ever I get imprisoned I'll remember to use a coffee-stained napkin and stale bread to make a chess set. I also learned from Egan Balas that to exercise in a confined space one takes an odd number of steps - else one walks in circles. Algorithmic ingenuity enabled him to successfully take up mathematics in his late 30s, against the conventional wisdom that good mathematicians do their work when young, and become an outstanding professor of industrial administration, applied mathematics and operations research at Carnegie Mellon University. He tells stories of his lives - escaping death narrowly - "according to my own taste", making it one of the most compelling biographies I have ever read. This would be an extraordinary thriller if it were fiction - but it's not, it's real. The highly personal account of how a Transylvanian Jew became a revolutionary worker, a dapper diplomat, a tortured prisoner and a creative academic takes one through some absolutely awful scenes. Balas' craftiness enabled him to survive and his toughness under severe torture protected his friends. This is not some second hand account of Communist and Nazi hate, Balas drags the reader through his pain and suffering. There are happier moments - such as when he comes out of prison and addresses his daughter - not realizing that he's speaking to a younger sibling born in his absence and that his daughter has grown considerably. For anyone who wants to understand willpower and survival in Hungary and Romania during the 2nd world war this is a must read. Besides historical interest, the story's suspense makes it an ideal gift for thriller and spy story readers.

I am a PhD student doing Operations Research - more specifically, Mixed Integer Programming - that is why I purchased this book, just because of the curiously about the autobiography of a brilliant mathematician in our field. I started this book in the end of Feb and couldn't help stopping digging into his unbelievable and inspiring life stories and have already started the third time. Everytime I get new gains and thoughts. First, it is definitely a good encouragement for my research work, by his enthusiasm and passion for knowledge and mathematics; in addition, I always can judge my attitude to life and people by learning from his experience and his eternal optimistic awareness. Here is a book, where you can find faith, justice, intelligence, honesty and love.

This autobiography is mindblowing. Explained in a plain and captivating style, it brings us to how past generations have endured (and fought) terrible times. Egon Balas is an increadible person from which we should all learn.

### Interesting Story

This book has opened my eyes and made me so thankful for my life. Dr. Balas, his family, and his friends have experienced so much terror and yet have been able to adapt and remain optimistic. I've read a lot of memoirs about World War II, genocide, etc., but this gave a different perspective.

excellent, true.

This book is outstanding. It gives the life story of Egon Balas, today a renowned mathematician at a top US university. This book, however, is not about mathematics. It is about Egon's life in Romania, about communism, WW2, and post-war societies of Eastern Europe. Much of the book is about universal topics that touch each and every one of us. It is about justice, betrayal, friendship, struggle for power, repression, perseverance, and the importance of family. It is about shattered ideals of youth. Egon fought for what seemed, based on data available at the time, a reasonable and noble cause. Later, other people abused this cause and eventually imprisoned him. It is difficult to imagine a bigger disappointment in life. Egon, however, survived, due a large number of factors, where his positive attitude, intelligence and persistence all played key roles. I only discovered this book because I was a PhD student Carnegie Mellon (in another department), and friends told me of Egon and his story. In all, a very interesting and rewarding reading. The fact that Egon survived all the ordeals, and that we can now read about all these events, is a true miracle. It makes this book very special. Film writers out there, this book could be made into a good movie! Complex characters, unpredictable, optimistic.

As a recent graduate from a technical University, not particularly well-read in history, I knew little about the events of this century in East-Central Europe beyond a few articles and documentaries I had seen. A colleague at work told me I should read "Will to Freedom", just published. I took my time starting it, but then I couldn't put it down. I find it hard to believe that a single person could have been through so much. In spite of his adventures and suffering under both the Nazis and Communists, Egon Balas writes dispassionately and without rancor. It is almost as if you could see a scientific

mind at work; he is, after all, a well-known mathematician. Precisely because he is such an objective narrator, I found this book to be a fascinating condensation of everything that went wrong with the twentieth century, as well as a truly uplifting example of "mind over matter". The book has been a real revelation for me, as I suspect it would be for most people.

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