

# Local author relives her mom's journey to freedom in 'Mirel's Daughter'



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Two new "biographical novels" unveil the lives of daughters who embarked on long journeys toward self-discovery and freedom – in more senses than one. The protagonists make their trips under very different circumstances, in separate countries, and in decades far apart.

Kay Gill, a native of Muncie, Ind., who now lives in Pewee Valley, has given a clear, well-written account of her mother's harrowing trek from terror to freedom in the just-published "Mirel's Daughter" (\$20, Fleur-de-Lis Press).

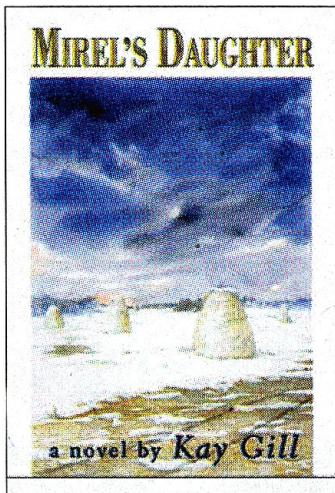
Her mother, born Sonia Turbowskia in the Ukrainian village of Brusilov, was barely 10 years old in 1919, when civil war pitted Ukrainian Nationalists, Bolsheviks and Tsarists against each other.

Caught in the middle of that post-Russian Revolution conflict were Ukraine's Jews, who have been falsely blamed for the region's problems for centuries.

Gill heard her mother's account of those terrible years in small amounts during her own childhood, adolescence and adulthood – the pleasant, child-appropriate memories at first, and the traumatic ones when she was old enough to understand them.

Gill is a longtime free-lance writer and editor whose credits include two Camille Glen cookbooks, "The Brown Hotel and Louisville's Magic Corner," and 10 years with "High Roads Folio."

In "Mirel's Daughter," she traces her mother's trek from Brusilov to Muncie by begin-



ning with a murderous attack on the family. Realizing that the vicious pogroms will only bring more disaster, Sonia, her sister (Raizel) and their mother (Mirel) escape into the countryside.

One by one, the trio becomes separated, and young Sonia must find her way to the home of relatives in Kiev by herself. Although Gill flavors Sonia's story with details about Jewish culture, her mother's fight to survive the turmoil around her mirrors that of refugees from other countries, and will touch anyone's heart.

By the time Sonia manages to set sail for America in 1922 (speaking only enough English to say "Hello, my name is Sonia"), she is eager to begin a new life in Chicago, and later, Indiana.

"Mirel's Daughter" is a fine first novel; interested readers may learn more about it at [mirelsdaughter.com](http://mirelsdaughter.com). Gill is now working on her second novel, "Magic City."

A very different story about a young woman's long journey is "Her Mother's Daughter: A Memoir of the Mother I Never Knew and of My Daughter, Courtney Love" (\$24.95, Doubleday).

Written by Linda Carroll, this book begins in the San Francisco of the 1950s and 1960s. The author, born to an indifferent mother and a father who had an unhealthy affection for his young child, was adopted by a prosperous family.

In a way, Carroll's tale is the opposite of Gill's. Whereas Sonia began her life with few material possessions, she had a strong sense of herself and cherished the happy memories of her family.

Carroll was given many advantages by her adoptive family, but felt empty within. She was carried away by the rudderless lifestyle of San Francisco during the hippie era and gave birth to a daughter of her own.

Her child, Courtney Michelle, tackled a troubled adolescence of her own. She experimented with alcohol, burned her mother's favorite possessions, and repeatedly harmed herself.

Courtney Michelle is now known in the world of rock 'n' roll as singer/songwriter Courtney Love. Those of us who are not fans of her music know her as the wife of Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain, who committed suicide in 1994.

"Her Mother's Daughter" is an interesting tale of a woman's desire to connect not only with her biological mother (who, Carroll discovered, was author Paula Fox), but also with her own child.

Much of what Carroll recounts is disturbing, but her book will hold your attention. Fans of Courtney Love will probably seek out "Her Mother's Daughter" for insights into the singer's life, but I imagine that this book will find a wider audience as well.