

My name is Lia and I want to tell you the story of when I was a little girl.

The year is 1938, and war is coming to Italy. How silly, thinks six-year-old Lia, that Italy's leader, Mussolini, doesn't want Jewish children to go to Italian schools anymore—or for Jewish papas to work. Mussolini won't even let Jews go on vacation.

When Papa loses his job, Lia's family must give up their home and move from city to city. As war comes closer, so does danger, until one day Lia and her sisters are sent to hide at a Catholic boarding school. Separated from her parents and from everything she knows and loves, Lia must find a way to survive and finds patches of light and kindness in the most surprising places.

Based on Lia Levi's own story, *Just a Girl* is a captivating tribute to all the children who have not only endured war—but have found the voice to share their stories.



Lia at age 10

Lia after the war

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Ages 8–12

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LIA LEVI

JUST A
GIRL

A TRUE STORY OF WORLD WAR II

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Twenty-five years after the publication of *Una bambina e basta* by
edizioni E/O, Lia Levi has adapted her story for young readers.

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ONE SUMMER AT THE SEASIDE

My name is Lia (if you look at the cover of this book, you'll find my name on it!) and I want to tell you the story of when I was a little girl. Mama, Papa, my two younger sisters, Gabriella and Vera, and I lived in a city in Italy called Turin.

Turin has a river and a park and lots of piazzas, which are like big town squares, but not the sea. It doesn't have the sea.



So when summer came, we would pack our bathing suits and our shovels and pails in our suitcases and take the train out to a tiny village with colored houses, sand, beach umbrellas, and small blue waves you could wade into even if you didn't know how to swim.

That's why my story starts with a newspaper stand right on the beach and my parents telling six-year-old Lia, "Today, you're going to buy the newspaper."

As I said, the stand is right at the end of the beach, which means you don't have to cross the road to get there. It is not dangerous for children.

Hmm. Why are they telling me to go buy a newspaper right now?

I think about it for a while. Then I understand.

I just finished first grade, but it is as if I never set foot in my classroom. As if I didn't even sit at those ugly desks, doing what everyone else did.

The reason is easy to explain. I was terribly (*terribly!*) shy, and at school I couldn't get one single sound to come out of my mouth.

Do you know what a baby bird sounds like? *Peep . . . peep . . . peep?* That was my voice. No one could hear it.

During my first days, the teacher listened extra hard, trying to understand what I was saying, but soon she got bored, preferring to just let the other children speak.

So when my parents send me to buy the newspaper, this is what they want: they want to make me do things that will force me to talk to other people!

So now I'm standing in front of the newsstand holding tightly to a coin.

"Sir, sir!" I think I'm shouting to the big man behind the counter.

But all that's coming out is probably the usual *peep . . . peep . . . peep*. And he isn't turning around.

How can I possibly get a newspaper? If I'm still holding this coin when I get back to my parents on the beach, they are going to be very unhappy.

That's when I make a very smart decision. I reach up and place the coin on the counter and

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take the newspaper myself.

“Here it is!” I yell, waving the newspaper.
(When I’m with my parents I *do* have a voice.)

Papa happily takes it, but then asks, “Where’s the change?”

“The man didn’t give me any,” I whimper.
Which is actually the truth.

This story does not end well.

The three of us—me, Papa, and Mama—head to the newsstand, where the man says he didn’t see any money and tells us to pay for the newspaper I took.

It’s a lie, but Papa pays anyway because he doesn’t like to argue.