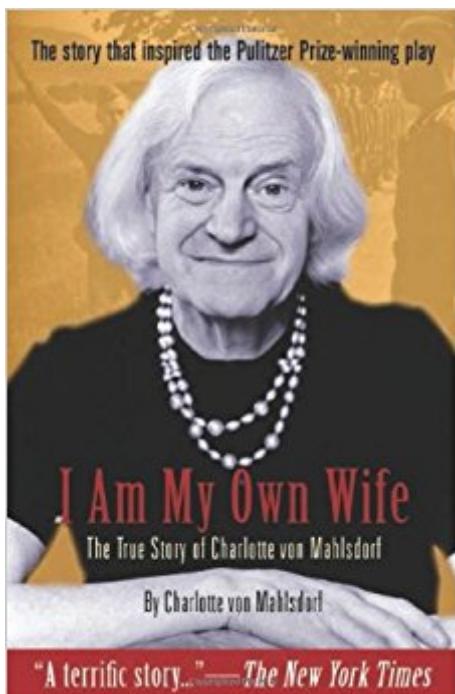


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# I Am My Own Wife: The True Story Of Charlotte Von Mahlsdorf



## Synopsis

A soft-spoken transvestite wanting nothing more than to live as a hausfrau, Charlotte von Mahlsdorf instead was caught up in the most harrowing dramas of 20th century Europe, surviving both the Nazis and the Communists. *I Am My Own Wife* is her exquisitely written autobiography where she reveals her lifelong pursuit of sexual liberty. The memoirs of a transvestite Berliner, the story of the wonderful GrÃ¶nderzeit museum, a look at German culture from the point of view of a permanent outsider, Charlotte's tale, like her life, is a surprising and provocative weave of sex, politics, and history. With the success of a new play about Charlotte, hailed by The New York Times as the "most stirring new work to appear on Broadway this fall," her story is reaching an entirely new readership of enthusiastic theater fans. Von Mahlsdorf was also the subject of a documentary, *I Am My Own Woman* (1993), directed by Rosa von Praunheim.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, born Lothar Berfelde in 1928 in Mahlsdorf, was the son of a benevolent mother and a tyrannical father. At a very early age (seven or eight), he discovered that he liked to wear his mother's old clothes, jauntily noting that "I still have my mania for aprons." His story is not all lightness and lipstick, however. Mahlsdorf recalls being transferred from public to private school after a teacher beat him for making a crack about Hitler Youth. He found a job working after school in an antique furniture store. But then a Jewish co-worker was taken away ("They probably need farm workers in Poland," his employer insisted hopefully), and more and more often they began

dealing in "Jewish bequests." Mahlsdorf escaped the war and his father by going with his mother, sister and brother to East Prussia, and from there to stay on his aunt's farm, where he was encouraged and nurtured by his lesbian aunt, herself a cross-dresser. Near the end of the war, when he returned to his home village, he killed his violent father during a confrontation and used a precursor of battered women's syndrome as his defense. Mahlsdorf did not slow down a bit in later years. He recalls creating a house-museum almost from scratch, East Germany's underground gay culture, the persecution he suffered from appearing in women's clothing in public and the divisiveness of the Berlin Wall. Although this is nonfiction, *I Am My Own Woman* reads like a traditional action-adventure story?with a cross-dressing furniture buff as the hero. Photos. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"As a child, Lothar Berfelde loved to wear an apron and polish porcelain....Instead his life took a bumpier course. -- Time Magazine"Charlotte's been smacked and pawed for decades by a gallery of rogues and brutes; and she's resisted." -- The Village Voice"Nothing short of breathtaking. A terrific story." -- The New York Times"Von Mahlsdorf's book is a 'Wife'-time achievement." -- New York Newsday, June 13, 2004

I did enjoy the book very much. It demanded that I get out my maps of Germany to find the areas where Charlotte lived, as she had lived in the time and vicinity of my own German ancestors. I thought her courage was remarkable, and also her luck, and was struck by the acceptance of the local people around her. I think this book also showed us that when people KNOW a multi-gendered person, or bi-gender person personally, it simply doesn't MATTER, and I loved that. But this book was disappointing in that it was less about her GENDER than about her survival during the occupation of the Nazis, and the war on all things and people "different." I was sad that she didn't talk about PEOPLE more and less about THINGS, but that was what mattered to her.

Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's story made me cry. It was so sad and wonderful and inspiring. After reading *I Am My Own Wife*, I ended up on a trip to Europe and made sure to visit her museum in Berlin. I felt so connected to that home just from reading her story.

Actually Martha Combs writing. What I especially liked about Charlotte's book is that it was almost like having a conversation with her. If one believes in guardian angels, I think she has a following.

So many experiences through which she survived - even when asserting herself about her furniture passions, lifestyle, etc. I repeatedly read and thought, "OMG. What were you thinkin?." Reading on she expressed exactly what she was thinking! Great capture of the time, place...so wonderful!

This is one of the most fascinating stories I have ever read. It is even more amazing when you realize that it is a true story.

This is a lovely read by a gentle man who felt he was really a woman in a manly body, and also it is the story of a German who lived in parts of Germany and Berlin that are gone and will never be again. I felt a nostalgia for times past for the neighborhood around the Alexanderplatz in Berlin which used to be the gay and lower class neighborhood and also the red light district. If one goes to Alexanderplatz today there is the hideous Russian Funkturm radio tower and almost everything has been bulldozed, and there is a huge statue of Michael Jackson (of all things) in the space where Alexanderplatz was, and the neighborhoods Charlotte knew will never be replaced. He has struggled bravely to take pieces here and there where he could and save them for the ages, fighting bravely in the face of the Soviets stealing everything from Berlin that wasn't nailed down and the east German mentality of bulldoze and build worker flats and raze what is the capitalist past. What a time to live in and how amazing to have the story of a transvestite who lived them and knew every thing and place from the bottom up, so to speak, it puts a new face on history. 5 Stars!Update October 2006: I just returned from Berlin where I visited the Grunderzeit Museum in Mahlsdorf which is a suburb of Berlin. You can get there on the S-Bahn and then walk to the museum (about a 15 minute walk). I was heartbroken to learn that Charlotte had passed away on April 30, 2002. The museum was nice and looks like it is a booming business. I bought some postcards and apparently there is a stage play currently running about the life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf (in Berlin). Berlin has changed since I was there last, and it is knitting itself together up the middle where it was divided. The museum has had structural repairs and the basement is available for parties. I liked the museum and it was worth the trip!

This is really well written and tells an important story. Too often we only get stories of trans women being beaten down by society and while von Mahlsdorf doesn't pretend her life was all roses, she does triumph and thrives.

XCELENT

Good

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