



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

May 2025

As winter approaches, find a comfortable warm spot in your home where you may relax and enjoy interesting books from the Reverend Katz library. Come to the library and make your selection from our wonderful and varied collection of Jewish themed books.

Thomas Harding, *The Einstein vendetta: Hitler, Mussolini and a true story of murder*

HIS HAR

A gripping true crime investigation into the murder of the relatives of Albert Einstein, Italy, August 1944. A unit of German soldiers arrives at a villa near Florence. Villa Il Focardo is home to Robert Einstein, cousin to the most famous scientist in the world, Albert Einstein, a prominent enemy of the Nazi regime. Twelve hours after arriving, the soldiers have vanished, and a family is dead.

This crime and what happened next still haunts those who survived. The Einstein family set against the backdrop of Nazi-occupied Florence during the WWII Vendetta, Thomas Harding recounts the story of an until-now untold true crime, one that unspools to reveal Italy's brutal wartime history, its fall to fascism, antisemitism and bitter partisanship and a family's search for justice

Rachel Seiffert, *Once the deed is done* F SEI

1945. Dead of night and dead of winter; war brings a stranger to the door; a family is tricked into a act of compassion and danger.

Northern Germany, 1945. Dead of night and dead of winter, a boy hears soldiers and sees strangers - forced labourers, fleeing across the heathland by his small town: shawls and skirts in the snowfall. The end days are close, war brings risk and chance, and Benno is witness to something he barely understands. Peace brings more soldiers, but English this time, and Red Cross staff officers. Ruth, on her first posting from London, is given charge of a refugee camp on the heathland, crowded with former forced labourers. As ever more keep arriving, she hears whispers, rumours of dark secrets about that snowy night.

The townspeople close ranks, shutting their mouths and minds to the winter's events, but the town children are curious about the refugees on their doorstep, and Benno can't carry his secret alone.

John Jay, *Ninette's war: a Jewish story of survival in 1940's France* BIO DRE

This is the heart-wrenching true story of a young Jewish girl coming of age in France during World War II. Ninette Dreyfus belonged to one of the most influential Jewish families in Paris, second only to the Rothschilds, her parents' social circle ranging from Einstein to Colette. But all that privilege counted for nothing when the Nazis arrived; the family was high up on the list of Philippe Petain's targets.

Inspired by diary entries and by conversations the author had with Ninette before she died, Ninette's War narrates the family's fall from grace alongside the creeping understanding of the Vichy government's collaboration with the Nazis. Through Ninette's eyes we witness how it all unfolded: from the anti-Semitism in the playground, sometimes from her own teachers to Ninette's first crush under a false identity. Woven into the political backdrop of a nation turning inward on itself, this is the tale of a life once filled with riches becoming rootless, where friends were left behind and politicians legislated their own people out of existence to their deaths, culminating in what we now know as the Holocaust.

Samantha Ellis, Chopping onions on my heart: on losing and preserving a culture HIS ELL

Samantha's mother tongue is dying out. An urgent need to find out more becomes an expansive investigation into how to keep hold of her culture and when to let it go.

The daughter of Iraqi Jewish refugees, Samantha grew up surrounded by the noisy, vivid, hot sounds of Judeo-Iraqi Arabic. A language that's now on the verge of extinction.

The realisation that she won't be able to tell her son he's 'living in the days of the aubergines' or 'chopping onions on my heart' opens the floodgates. The questions keep coming. How can she pass on the stories without passing on the trauma of displacement? Will her son ever love mango pickle?

In her search for answers Samantha encounters demon bowls, the perils of kohl and the unexpected joys of fusion food. Her journey transports us from the clamour of Noah's Ark to the calm of the British Museum, from the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages to the banks of the River Tigris. As Samantha considers what we lose and keep, she also asks what we might need to let go of to preserve our culture and ourselves.

This is a life-affirming memoir about resilience and repair, and the healing power of dancing to our ancestors' music, cooking up their recipes and sharing their stories.

Andre Acimen, My Roman year BIO ACI

The elegant and insightful memoir from the bestselling author, Andre Acimen.

1960s Rome. As teenage Andre Acimen stands on the dock, his mother fusses over their luggage, 32 suitcases, trunks and tea chests that contain their world. The ship will refuel and return to Rome. Andre Acimen is now head of the family, with a little brother to keep in line and a mother to translate for, for although she's mute, she is nothing if not communicative. Alexandria, the home where they have left their father, as the Aciman family begin a new adventure. Equal parts transporting and beautiful, this coming of age memoir shares the luminous, fragile truth of life for a family forever in exile, living in Rome, but still yet to find a home.

Karen Kirsten, Irena's gift HOL KIR

In 1942, in Nazi-occupied Poland, a Jewish child was smuggled out of the Warsaw ghetto in a backpack. That child was Karen Kirsten's mother, but she knew nothing about this extraordinary event until one day a letter arrived from a stranger. After Karen eventually discovered the grandparents, she loved dearly were in fact not her biological grandparents, she travelled the globe to uncover her family's past and to find the answers to baffling questions: why did her adoptive grandmother treat Karen's mother so unkindly? Why did she hide the truth that she was her

mother's aunt? And why, if she appeared to dislike Karen's mother, did she risk her life to save her and bring her to Australia?

Irena's Gift weaves together a mystery, history and memoir to tell the story of a family torn apart by war. From the glittering concert halls of interbellum Warsaw to the vermin-infested prison where a Jewish woman negotiates with an SS officer to save her sister's child, *Irena's Gift* is about the lies we tell to survive and what happens when those lies unravel. It is about the extraordinary resilience of three generations of women, and the sacrifices made for love.

'This is a story of extraordinary women, survival and sacrifice. A must read.' Tara Moss.