



## Reverend Katz Library

### New Book Reviews

August 2023

We invite you to read the reviews of the wonderful selection of interesting new books we have added to our collection during August. These books are available for loan so please come to the Rev Katz library to borrow these new books to enjoy a wonderful reading experience.

#### **Jackie Kohnstam, *The memory keeper a journey into the Holocaust to find my family* BIO KOH**

The compelling story of Jackie Kohnstamm's search for the truth about her grandparents' deaths in the Holocaust.

Jackie Kohnstamm's mother rarely talked about what had happened during the war and had kept little evidence of her early life. It was only after her uncle and aunt had died that Jackie inherited an archive of material relating to the family back in Germany. Jackie's mother had managed to get out of Berlin in 1936, following her brother and sister who had already escaped. But Jackie's grandparents had remained. One night, on a whim, Jackie Googled her grandparents' names. What she found felt like a sign: four days earlier two Stolpersteine ('stumble stones') had been laid in their names outside the house in Berlin where they had once lived. Someone had commissioned this memorial to her grandparents. Each listed their name, year of birth, date of deportation to Theresienstadt and date of their murder by the Nazis. Here, then, was the first step, and what followed was a remarkable story of loss, discovery, and memory.

#### **Michael W Twitty, *Koshersoul! The faith and food journey of an African American Jew.* BIO TWI**

"Twitty makes the case that Blackness and Judaism coexist in beautiful harmony, and this is manifested in the foods and traditions from both cultures that Black Jews incorporate into their daily lives...Twitty wishes to start a conversation where people celebrate their differences and embrace commonalities. By drawing on personal narratives, his own and others', and exploring different cultures, Twitty's book offers important insight into the journeys of Black Jews." —*Library Journal*

The James Beard award-winning author of the acclaimed *The Cooking Gene* explores the cultural crossroads of Jewish and African diaspora cuisine and issues of memory, identity, and food. In *Koshersoul*, Michael W. Twitty considers the marriage of two of the most distinctive culinary cultures in the world today: the foods and traditions of the African Atlantic and the global Jewish diaspora. To Twitty, the creation of African-Jewish cooking is a conversation of migrations and a dialogue of diasporas offering a rich background for inventive recipes and the people who create them.

#### **Angus Trumble, *Helena Rubinstein: The Australian years***

The captivating story of the first global cosmetics empire, the fascinating woman who built it, and the past she preferred to leave behind.

'Because of Trumble's surgical precision, his empathy and self-awareness, his humour, his grace, his exquisite visual sense ... in his hands the facts of Rubinstein's life take on new and startling significance.' —Sarah Krasnostein.

Helena Rubinstein (1872–1965) is best known for creating the world's first global cosmetics empire. At its height, her name was synonymous with glamour, with salons in Paris, London and New York, and beauty products sold at cosmetics counters around the world.

Much less well known are the years Rubinstein spent in Australia before she was famous. Recently arrived from Poland, aged twenty-three and speaking little English, she worked as a governess and waitress before opening her first salon in Melbourne in 1902. In this captivating and wryly entertaining portrait, Angus Trumble retraces Rubinstein's forgotten Australian years. Later, Rubinstein worked hard to suppress key details of her early life, but they reveal the origins of her extraordinary rise. In the laneways of Melbourne and the dusty streets of Coleraine, we see her laying the foundations of a global empire.

This is the fascinating story of an enigmatic woman, the myth she carefully curated, and the past she preferred to leave behind.

### **Peter Brune, *Suffering redemption and triumph: The first wave of postwar Australian immigrants***

#### **HIS BRU**

Between 1946 and 1966 large numbers of displaced persons (DPs) came to Australia to escape the horrors of war-torn Europe.

Peter Brune's latest work had its genesis in more than 40 interviews he conducted with DPs in the period 2001–2022. He spoke to migrants from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece and Hungary.

Inspired by their resilience, their enterprise and their determination to make a new life for themselves in Australia, the author has written about their harrowing war experiences—drawing largely on their own words—their reception in Australia and their first responses to an alien culture. Their subsequent reflections on the journeys they undertook and how they fared here are both moving and revelatory.

Peter also analyses the Chifley government's immigration policies, which were driven by Arthur Calwell, and the selection criteria that were applied to assess applicants. Both Chifley and Calwell saw the need for a greater population for economic and security reasons; but they also felt an obligation to alleviate the deprivations suffered by millions of Europeans.

This book is an extraordinary exposition of how mass postwar immigration created the modern, multicultural society in which we now live. Peter makes the case that it is one of the most significant periods in the Australian story.

### **Meryl Frank, *Unearthed: A lost actress, a forbidden book and a search for life in the shadow of the Holocaust*. BIO FRA**

A thrilling mystery woven into a beautifully constructed family memoir: Meryl Frank's journey to seek the truth about a beloved and revolutionary cousin, a celebrated actress in Vilna before World War II, and to answer the question of how the next generation should honour the memory of the Holocaust.

As a child, Meryl Frank was the chosen inheritor of family remembrance. Her aunt Mollie, a formidable and cultured woman, insisted that Meryl never forget who they were, where they came from, and the hate that nearly destroyed them. Over long afternoons, Mollie told her about the city, the theatre, and, above all else, Meryl's cousin, the radiant Franya Winter. Franya was the leading light of Vilna's Yiddish theatre, a remarkable and precocious woman who cast off the restrictions of her Hasidic family and community to play roles as prostitutes and bellhops, lovers and nuns. Yet there was one thing her aunt Mollie would never tell Meryl: how Franya died. Before Mollie passed away, she gave Meryl a Yiddish book containing the terrible answer but forbade her to read it. And for years, Meryl obeyed.

Unearthed is the story of Meryl's search for Franya and a timely history of hatred and resistance. Through archives across four continents, by way of chance encounters and miraculous discoveries, and eventually, guided by the shocking truth recorded in the pages of the forbidden book, Meryl conjures the rogue spirit of her cousin—her beauty and her tragedy. Meryl's search reveals a lost world destroyed by hatred, illuminating the cultural haven of Vilna and its resistance during World War II. As she seeks to find her lost family legacy, Meryl looks for answers to the questions that have defined her life: what is our duty to the past? How do we honour such memories while keeping them from consuming us? And what do we teach our children about tragedy?

**Karen, Kirsten, Irena's gift     F 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.

**Jennifer Rosner, Once we were home     F ROS**

*When your past is stolen, where do you belong?* Ana will never forget her mother's face when she and her baby brother, Oskar, were sent out of their Polish ghetto and into the arms of a Christian friend. For Oskar, though, their new family is the only one he remembers. When a woman from a Jewish reclamation organization seizes them, believing she has their best interest at heart, Ana sees an opportunity to reconnect with her roots, while Oskar sees only the loss of the home he loves.

Roger grows up in a monastery in France, inventing stories and trading riddles with his best friend in a life of quiet concealment. When a relative seeks to retrieve him, the Church steals him across the Pyrenees before relinquishing him to family in Jerusalem.

Renata, a post-graduate student in archaeology, has spent her life unearthing secrets from the past--except for her own. After her mother's death, Renata's grief is entwined with all the questions her mother left unanswered, including why they fled Germany so quickly when Renata was a little girl. Two decades later, they are each building lives for themselves, trying to move on from the trauma and loss that haunts them. But as their stories converge in Israel, in unexpected ways, they must each ask where and to whom they truly belong.

Beautifully evocative and tender, filled with both luminosity and anguish, *Once We Were Home* reveals a little-known history. Based on the true stories of children stolen during wartime, this heart-wrenching novel raises questions of complicity and responsibility, belonging and identity, good intentions, and unforeseen consequences, as it confronts what it really means to find home.