



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

February 2022

We were happy to have our first meeting for 2022 this month. Our enthusiastic team of library committee members met on 7 February and we were all happy to have the library up and running once again. A reminder to all our readers if you are looking for a specific book, our library catalogue appears on the North shore Synagogue website: www.nss.asn.au

Click on Library and then Library catalogue and the options appear for Author Catalogue, Subject Catalogue, and Title catalogue. The abbreviated letters after the title refer to the location of the book on the shelves.

Thank you to Gillian and Andrew Samuel of Roseville who presented a generous gift to The Rev Katz Library. (See details below)

Emil Schurer, The history of the Jewish people in the age of Jesus Christ. 4 Volumes HIS SCH

This elaborate work on the history of the Jews in the time of Christ, made Emil Schurer one of the best known of modern German scholars in Great Britain and the United States. He was a German Protestant theologian known mainly for his study of the history of the Jews around the time of Jesus' ministry providing interesting knowledge and information about this period in history.

Gershon Gorenberg War of Shadows: Code breakers, spies and the secret struggle to drive the Nazis from the Middle East HIS GOR

As World War II raged in North Africa, General Irwin Rommel was guided by an uncanny sense of his enemies' plans and weaknesses. In the summer of 1942, he led his Axis army swiftly and terrifyingly toward Alexandria, with the goal of overrunning the entire Middle East. Each step was informed by detailed updates on British positions. The Nazis, somehow, had a source for the Allies' greatest secrets.

Yet the Axis powers were not the only ones with intelligence. Brilliant Allied cryptographers worked relentlessly at Bletchley Park, breaking down the extraordinarily complex Nazi code Enigma. From decoded German messages, they discovered that the enemy had a wealth of inside information. On the brink of disaster, a fevered and high-stakes search for the source began.

War of Shadows is the cinematic story of the race for information in the North African theater of World War II, set against intrigues that spanned the Middle East. Years in the making, this book is a feat of historical research and storytelling, and a rethinking of the popular narrative of the war. It portrays the conflict not as an inevitable clash of heroes and villains but a spiraling series of failures, accidents, and desperate triumphs that decided the fate of the Middle East and quite possibly the outcome of the war.

Jonathan Kaufman, Kings of Shanghai: two rival dynasties and the creation of modern China HIS KAU

Kings of Shanghai is at once the intimate story of two families and a sweeping account of how modern Shanghai was born. An epic, multigenerational story of two rival dynasties who flourished in Shanghai and Hong Kong as twentieth century China surged into the modern era.

By the 1930s, the Sassoons had been doing business in China for a century, rivaled in wealth and influence by only one other dynasty - the Kadoories. These two Jewish families, both originally from Baghdad, stood astride Chinese business and politics for more than one hundred and seventy-five years, profiting from the Opium Wars; surviving Japanese occupation; courting Chiang Kai-shek; and nearly losing everything as the Communists swept into power. In *Kings of Shanghai*, Jonathan Kaufman tells the remarkable history of how these families ignited an economic boom and opened China to the world but remained blind to the country's deep inequality and to the political turmoil on their doorsteps. In a story stretching from Baghdad to Hong Kong to Shanghai to London, Kaufman enters the lives and minds of these ambitious men and women to forge a tale of opium smuggling, family rivalry, political intrigue and survival.

Ronni Kahn and Jessica Chapnik Kahn, *A repurposed life* BIO KAH

As the owner of a successful events company, throwing away huge volumes of leftover food at the end of the day came with the territory. But when Ronni Kahn hit midlife, she found herself no longer able to turn a blind eye to her food waste problem. Hand delivering the untouched food to homeless shelters around Sydney became her renegade solution. Little did she know that fixing her small problem at work would lead her to unlock a hidden purpose at the very core of her inner life.

Now founder and CEO of the food rescue organisation OzHarvest, Ronni leads hundreds of staff and thousands of volunteers with the goal to nourish Australia. She serves in an advisory capacity to government and is an instrumental leader in changing federal laws to improve social justice and environmental policies.

A Repurposed Life is the story of how Ronni found her voice, her heart and her deepest calling. From her early years growing up under the brutal system of apartheid South Africa, to a socialist commune in Israel, Ronni finally settled in Australia to discover a profound new way of living. Shared with the humour, warmth and energy that have made her an internationally renowned keynote speaker, this heartfelt exploration of the choices that define us will speak to anyone seeking a more passionate expression of being alive.

Gary Gray, *A spoonful of soup and other stories* LIT GRA

Gary Gray presents a testimony of his experiences throughout the Holocaust years. Written as a collection of short stories, together they make up an account of a young man's experiences while incarcerated for three years during the German occupation. Aged just thirteen years Gray was incarcerated by the Nazis. Born in 1930 into an affluent family in Poland, he talks briefly of the fear and anticipation of the years leading to German occupation. In 1941 the Judenrat selected him to be put to work. In 1942 Gray was conscripted into the Birkenheim camp where he was put to work on the German railways. After being liberated from the Sportshule Reichenbach Concentration Camp on May 5th 1945, he made the trip home to discover firsthand what had happened to his family. He later worked in the Ministry of Commerce in Warsaw for several years before discovering that he had two aunts in Australia. He writes about the difficulty of obtaining a passport in Poland in the post war years, and his move to Australia.

This account is not written in chronological order but rather as a pastiche of memories and recollections. When read together, they take the reader on a journey through his experiences. Each story reflects a different aspect of his life through the war period, and there are many accounts of different individuals. His writing is reflective in nature as he is writing as an adult looking back on his experiences.

Ellen Feldman, *The living and the lost* F FEL

From the author of *Paris Never Leaves You*, Ellen Feldman's *The Living and the Lost* is a gripping story of a young German Jewish woman who returns to Allied Occupied Berlin from America to face the past and unexpected future.

Millie (Meike) Mosbach and her brother David, manage to escape to the States just before Kristallnacht, leaving their parents and little sister in Berlin. Millie attends Bryn Mawr on a special scholarship for non-Aryan German girls and graduates to a magazine job in Philadelphia. David enlists in the army and is eventually posted to the top-secret Camp Ritchie in Maryland, which trains German-speaking men for intelligence work.

Now they are both back in their former hometown, haunted by ghosts and hoping against hope to find their family. Millie works in the office responsible for rooting out the most dedicated Nazis from publishing; she is consumed with rage at her former country and its citizens, though she is finding it more difficult to hate in proximity. David works trying to help displaced persons build new lives, while hiding his more radical night-time activities from his sister. Like most of their German-born American colleagues, they suffer from conflicts of rage and guilt at their own good fortune, except for Millie's boss, Major Harry Sutton, who seems much too eager to be fair to the Germans.

Eddie Jaku, *The happiest man on earth* BIO JAK

WINNER OF THE ABIA BIOGRAPHY OF THE YEAR 2021

Life can be beautiful if you make it beautiful. It is up to you.

Eddie Jaku always considered himself a German first, a Jew second. He was proud of his country. But all of that changed in November 1938, when he was beaten, arrested, and taken to a concentration camp.

Over the next seven years, Eddie faced unimaginable horrors every day, first in Buchenwald, then in Auschwitz, then on a Nazi death march. He lost family, friends, his country.

Because he survived, Eddie made the vow to smile every day. He pays tribute to those who were lost by telling his story, sharing his wisdom and living his best possible life. He now believes he is the 'happiest man on earth'.

Published as Eddie turns 100, this is a powerful, heartbreaking and ultimately hopeful memoir of how happiness can be found even in the darkest of times.

David Boucher and Lucy Boucher, *Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, deaths and entrances* MUS BOU
Both Dylan and Cohen have been a presence on the music and poetry landscape spanning six decades. This book begins with a discussion of their contemporary importance, and how they have sustained their enduring appeal as performers and recording artists. The authors argue that both Dylan and Cohen shared early aspirations that mirrored the Beat Generation. They sought to achieve the fame of Dylan Thomas, who proved a bohemian poet could thrive outside the academy, and to live his life of unconditional social irresponsibility.

While Dylan's and Cohen's fame fluctuated over the decades, it was sustained by self-consciously adopted personas used to distance themselves from their public selves. This separation of self requires an exploration of the artists' relation to religion as an avenue to find and preserve inner identity. The relationship between their lyrics and poetry is explored in the context of Federico García Lorca's concept of the poetry of inspiration and the emotional depths of 'duende.' Such ideas draw upon the dislocation of the mind and the liberation of the senses that so struck Dylan and Cohen when they first read the poetry and letters of Arthur Rimbaud and Lorca. The authors show that performance and the poetry are integral, and the 'duende,' or passion, of the delivery, is inseparable from the lyric or poetry, and common to Dylan, Cohen and the Beat Generation.

Deborah Feldman, *Unorthodox: the scandalous rejection of my Hasidic roots* BIO FEL

As a member of the strictly religious Satmar sect of Hasidic Judaism, Deborah Feldman grew up under a code of relentlessly enforced customs governing everything from what she could wear and to whom she could speak to what she was allowed to read. Yet in spite of her repressive upbringing, Deborah grew into an independent-minded young woman whose stolen moments reading about the empowered literary characters of Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott helped her to imagine an alternative way of life among the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Trapped as a teenager in a sexually and emotionally dysfunctional marriage to a man she barely knew, the tension between Deborah's desires and her responsibilities as a good Satmar girl grew more explosive until she gave birth at nineteen and realized that, regardless of the obstacles, she would have to forge a path—for herself and her son—to happiness and freedom.

Myriam Anissimov, *Primo Levi: tragedy of an optimist* BIO LEV

Myriam Anissimov's major biography of Primo Levi delves deeply into the life and mind of this controversial writer, philosopher, and Holocaust witness, exploring the complex nature of a man who was both a strong-spirited survivor and a sufferer of severe bouts of depression, a man who felt misunderstood. His experiences at Auschwitz resulted in some of this century's most remarkable literature, which includes *The Periodic Table* and *Survival at Auschwitz*. He was haunted not only by his own experiences, but by the fear that future generations would inevitably forget and even deny the Holocaust. On April 11, 1987, Levi committed suicide, throwing himself down the staircase of the building where he was born. By bringing Levi's life into focus with material gathered from exhaustive research, interviews with his friends and relatives, and numerous unpublished texts and testimonies, Anissimov's biography is an invaluable contribution to Holocaust scholarship and a crucial companion to the writings of this tortured genius.

Dina Gold, *Stolen Legacy : Nazi theft and the quest for Justice at Krausenstrasse, Berlin* HIS GOL

When Dina Gold was a little girl, her grandmother told her stories about the glamorous life she had led in pre-war Berlin and how she dreamed of one day reclaiming the grand building that had housed the family business.

Dina's grandmother died in 1977, leaving behind no documents, not even an address, to help locate the property or prove its ownership. But when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Dina had not forgotten her grandmother's tales and set out to find the truth.

In 1990, Dina marched into a German government ministry at Krausenstrasse 17/18, just two blocks from Checkpoint Charlie, and declared:

"I've come to claim my family's building."

And so began her legal struggle — to reclaim the building that had belonged to her family.

Noa Tishby, *Israel: a simple guide to the most misunderstood country on earth.* ISR TIS

Israel. The small strip of arid land but remains a hot-button issue and a thorny topic of debate. But while everyone seems to have a strong opinion about Israel, how many people know the facts?

Here to fill in the information gap is Israeli American Noa Tishby. But "this is not your Bubbie's history book" (Bill Maher, host of *Real Time with Bill Maher*). Instead, offering a fresh, 360-degree view, Tishby brings her "passion, humour, and deep intimacy" (Yossi Klein Halevi, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*) to the subject, creating an accessible and dynamic portrait of a tiny country of outsized relevance. Through bite-sized chunks of history and

deeply personal stories, Tishby chronicles her homeland's evolution, beginning in Biblical times and moving forward to cover everything from WWI to Israel's creation to the disputes dividing the country today. Tackling popular misconceptions with an abundance of facts, Tishby provides critical context around headline-generating controversies and offers a clear, intimate account of the richly cultured country of Israel.