



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

May 2023

We invite you to come to The Reverend Katz Library, browse our shelves, and make your selection from our wonderful collection of varied and interesting books. The new books listed below are available on the display as you enter the library. We wish you a month of wonderful reading with a Jewish flavour.

Bernard Wasserstein, *A small town in Ukraine: the place we came from, the place we went back to*

HIS WAS

Decades ago, the historian Bernard Wasserstein set out to uncover the hidden past of the town forty miles west of Lviv where his family originated: Krakowiec (Krah-KOV-yets). In this book he recounts its dramatic and traumatic history. 'I want to observe and understand how some of the great forces that determined the shape of our times affected ordinary people.' The result is an exceptional, often moving book.

Wasserstein traces the arc of history across centuries of religious and political conflict, as armies of Cossacks, Turks, Swedes, and Muscovites rampaged through the region. In the age of enlightenment, the Polish magnate Ignacy Cetner built his palace at Krakowiec and, with his vivacious daughter, Princess Anna, created an arcadia of refinement and serenity. Under the Habsburg emperors after 1772, Krakowiec developed into a typical shtetl, with a jostling population of Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews.

In 1914, disaster struck. 'Seven years of terror and carnage' left a legacy of ferocious national antagonisms. During the Second World War the Jews were murdered in circumstances harrowingly described by Wasserstein. After the war the Poles were expelled, and the town dwindled into a border outpost. Today, the storm of history once again flows through Krakowiec as hordes of refugees flee for their lives from Ukraine to Poland.

At the beginning and end of the book we encounter Wasserstein's own family, especially his grandfather Berl. In their lives and the many others Wasserstein has rediscovered, the people of Krakowiec become a prism through which we can feel the shocking immediacy of history.

Benjamin Netanyahu, *Bibi: my story* BIO NET

From their earliest days, Bibi and his close-knit brothers, Yoni and Iddo, were instilled with purpose. Born in the wake of the Holocaust at the dawn of Israel's independence and raised in a family with a prominent Zionist history, they understood that the Jewish state was a hard-won and still precarious gift. All three studied in American high schools—where they learned to appreciate the United States—before returning to their cherished homeland.

The brothers joined an elite special forces outfit of the Israeli Defence Forces known as "the Unit." At twenty-two, Bibi was wounded while leading his team in the rescue of hostages from a hijacked plane. Four years later, in 1976, Yoni was killed in Entebbe, Uganda, while leading his men in one of

the most daring hostage-rescue missions in modern times. Yoni became a legend; Bibi felt he would never recover from his grief. Yet, inspired by Yoni's legacy and guided by the wisdom of his visionary historian father, Bibi thrust himself into the international struggle against terrorism, ultimately becoming the longest-serving prime minister in Israel's history—an honor he further cemented by winning re-election in 2022.

In this memoir Bibi weaves together his gripping personal story with the dramatic history of Israel and the Jewish people. Through a host of vivid anecdotes, he narrates his own evolution from soldier to statesman, while providing a unique perspective on leadership, the fraught geopolitics of the Middle East, and his successful efforts to liberate Israel's economy, which helped turn it into a global powerhouse of technological innovation.

Andy Borowitz, Profiles in Ignorance: How American politicians got dumber and dumber HIS BOR

*WASHINGTON POST BESTSELLER * Named One of 7 Best Nonfiction Books of the Fall by Kirkus Reviews*

Andy Borowitz, "one of the funniest people in America" (CBS Sunday Morning), brilliantly examines the intellectual deterioration of American politics, from Ronald Reagan to Dan Quayle, from George W. Bush to Sarah Palin, to its apotheosis in Donald J. Trump.

The winner of the first-ever National Press Club award for humour, Andy Borowitz has been called a "Swiftian satirist" (The Wall Street Journal) and "one of the country's finest satirists" (The New York Times). Millions of fans and New Yorker readers enjoy his satirical news column "The Borowitz Report." Now, in Profiles in Ignorance, he offers a witty, spot-on diagnosis of our country's political troubles by showing how ignorant leaders are degrading, embarrassing, and endangering our nation.

Borowitz argues that over the past fifty years, American politicians have grown increasingly allergic to knowledge, and mass media have encouraged the election of ignoramuses by elevating candidates who are better at performing than thinking. Starting with Ronald Reagan's first campaign for governor of California in 1966 and culminating with the election of Donald J. Trump to the White House, Borowitz shows how, during the age of twenty-four-hour news and social media, the US has elected politicians to positions of great power whose lack of the most basic information is terrifying. In addition to Reagan, Quayle, Bush, Palin, and Trump, Borowitz covers a host of congresspersons, senators, and governors who have helped lower the bar over the past five decades.

Profiles in Ignorance aims to make us both laugh and cry: laugh at the idiotic antics of these public figures, and cry at the cataclysms these icons of ignorance have caused. But most importantly, the book delivers a call to action and a cause for optimism: History doesn't move in a straight line, and we can change course if we act now.

Carl Bernstein, Chasing History: A kid in the Newsroom BIO BER

In this triumphant memoir, Carl Bernstein, the Pulitzer Prize-winning co-author of All the President's Men and pioneer of investigative journalism, recalls his beginnings as an audacious teenage newspaper reporter in the nation's capital, a winning tale of scrapes, gumshoeing, and American bedlam.

In 1960, Bernstein was just a sixteen-year-old at considerable risk of failing to graduate high school. Inquisitive, self-taught and, yes, truant, Bernstein landed a job as a copyboy at the Evening Star, the afternoon paper in Washington. By nineteen, he was a reporter there.

In *Chasing History*, Bernstein recalls the origins of his storied journalistic career as he chronicles the Kennedy era, the swelling civil rights movement, and a slew of grisly crimes. He spins a buoyant, frenetic account of educating himself in what Bob Woodward describes as “the genius of perpetual engagement.”

Funny and exhilarating, poignant and frank, *Chasing History* is an extraordinary memoir of life on the cusp of adulthood for a determined young man with a dogged commitment to the truth.

Michael Frank, *One hundred Saturdays: Stella Levi and the search for the lost world* BIO LEV

*One of Wall Street Journal's Ten Best Books of the Year * Winner of the National Jewish Book Awards for Holocaust Memoir and Sephardic Culture * Recipient of the Jewish Book Council's Natan Notable Book Award * Winner of the Sophie Brody Medal*

The remarkable story of ninety-nine-year-old Stella Levi whose conversations with the author over the course of six years bring to life the vibrant world of Jewish Rhodes, the deportation to Auschwitz that extinguished ninety percent of her community, and the resilience and wisdom of the woman who lived to tell the tale.

With nearly a century of life behind her, Stella Levi had never before spoken in detail about her past. Then she met Michael Frank. He came to her Greenwich Village apartment one Saturday afternoon to ask her a question about the Juderia, the neighbourhood on the Greek island of Rhodes where she'd grown up in a Jewish community that had thrived there for half a millennium.

Neither of them could know this was the first of one hundred Saturdays over the course of six years that they would spend in each other's company. During these meetings Stella traveled back in time to conjure what it felt like to come of age on this luminous, legendary island in the eastern Aegean, which the Italians conquered in 1912, began governing as an official colonial possession in 1923, and continued to administer even after the Germans seized control in September 1943. The following July, the Germans rounded up all 1,700-plus residents of the Juderia and sent them first by boat and then by train to Auschwitz on what was the longest journey—measured by both time and distance—of any of the deportations. Ninety percent of them were murdered upon arrival.

Probing and courageous, candid and sly, Stella is a magical modern day Scheherazade whose stories reveal what it was like to grow up in an extraordinary place in an extraordinary time.

Jai Chakrabati, *A small sacrifice for an enormous happiness* LIT CHAK

“As impeccable as the title story is, every entry astonishes” (The New York Times), from the National Jewish Book Award-winning author of *A Play for the End of the World*

In the fourteen masterful stories that make up this collection, Jai Chakrabarti crosses continents and cultures to explore what it means to cultivate a family today, across borders, religions, and race.

In the title story, a closeted gay man in 1980s Kolkata seeks to have a child with his lover's wife. An Indian widow, engaged to a Jewish man, struggles to balance her cultural identity with the rituals and traditions of her newfound family. An American musician travels to see his guru for the final time—and makes a promise he cannot keep. A young woman from an Indian village arrives in Brooklyn to care for the toddler of a biracial couple. And a mystical agent is sent by a mother to solve her son's domestic problems.

Throughout, the characters' most vulnerable desires shape life-altering decisions as they seek to balance their needs against those of the people, they hold closest. The stories in *A Small Sacrifice for an Enormous Happiness* capture men and women struggling with transformation and familial bonds; they traverse the intersections of countries and cultures to illuminate what it means to love in uncertain times; and they showcase the skill of a storyteller who dazzles with the breadth of his vision.