



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

May 2022

This past month we commemorated Anzac Day, Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. In our library we have many interesting books about these significant days. The first book reviewed this month was recommended for Anzac reading from the Jewish perspective. We have more books on this topic on order for next month.

Lian Knight, *Ratbag Soldier Saint: the real story of Sergeant Issy Smith VC* BIO SMI

Lian Knight has recreated the amazing life of her grandfather, a war hero. What has been published about him is extraordinary – 2000 newspaper articles, many printed more than a century ago. Yet almost nothing written about him is consistent. The press varied his name, his age, his place of birth, where he lived and what he did. There were whispers that he emerged from poverty, delivering fish before dawn in London's East End in the markets and laneways of Jack the Ripper's local haunts, before joining the army at just thirteen. Averse to authority, he was a military superior's nightmare. He served in South Africa and India before migrating to Australia. When World War I broke out, he was despatched to the Western Front where, gassed, bombed and working against remarkable odds, he saved the lives of many and was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for valour. He became legendary, gaining medals and escaping death on numerous occasions. After the war he married and finally returned to Australia. He was famous in England and Australia for his bravery and kindness to his fellow man. Later as a movie star, a politician, a boxer, a celebrated Australian identity and a good Samaritan, his notoriety seemed to know no bounds. Which of these stories were real? A mixture of truth and fantasy has continued to be reported ... until now.

Howard Jacobson, *Mother's Boy: a writer's beginnings* BIO JAC

In *Mother's Boy*, Booker-Prize winner Howard Jacobson reveals how he became a writer. It is an exploration of belonging and not-belonging, of being an insider and outsider, both English and Jewish. Jacobson was forty when his first novel was published. In *Mother's Boy* he traces the life that brought him there. Born to a working-class family in 1940s Manchester, the great-grandson of Lithuanian and Russian immigrants, Jacobson was raised by his mother, grandmother and aunt Joyce. His father was a regimental tailor, as well as an upholsterer, a market-stall holder, a taxi driver, a balloonist, and a magician.

Grappling always with his family's history and his Jewish identity, Jacobson takes us from the growing pains of childhood to studying at Cambridge under F.R. Leavis and landing in Sydney as a maverick young professor on campus. After his first marriage and the birth of his son, he lived in places as disparate as London, Wolverhampton, Boscastle and Melbourne, and worked many different jobs to make ends meet, from selling handbags on a market stall, to teaching English in schools, universities and sometimes football stadiums, and even helping to run an Australian-inspired restaurant in the middle of Cornwall.

Full of Jacobson's trademark humour and infused with bittersweet memories of his parents, this is the story of a writer's beginnings - as well as the twists and turns that life takes - and of learning to understand who you are before you can become the writer you were meant to be.

Ishmael Khaldi, A shepherd's journey: the story of Israel's first Bedouin diplomat HIS MCA

A Shepherd's Journey is Ishmael Khaldi's unique story of transformation from his modest village roots to his triumph as Israel's first Bedouin diplomat and voice of reason in the Middle East. Born into a traditional Bedouin family in a poor Bedouin village in northern Israel, Ishmael Khaldi's road has not been an easy one. From his early days as a shepherd to his schoolboy "fights," his terrifying first forays into the mysterious New York subway system, and later, his remarkable friendships with Jews and Muslims, religious and secular, on two continents, Ishmael Khaldi's life has been full of adventure and love, humour and pathos. This is a story that will inspire, educate and charm, told with authenticity and passion, as only a Bedouin can tell it.

James McAuley, The house of fragile things: Jewish Art collectors and the fall of France HIS MCA

A powerful history of Jewish art collectors in France, and how an embrace of art and beauty was met with hatred and destruction

In the dramatic years between 1870 and the end of World War II, a number of prominent French Jews—pillars of an embattled community—invested their fortunes in France's cultural artifacts, sacrificed their sons to the country's army, and were ultimately rewarded by seeing their collections plundered and their families deported to Nazi concentration camps.

In this rich, evocative account, James McAuley explores the central role that art and material culture played in the assimilation and identity of French Jews in the *fin-de-siècle*. Weaving together narratives of various figures, some familiar from the works of Marcel Proust and the diaries of Jules and Edmond Goncourt—the Camondos, the Rothschilds, the Ephrussis, the Cahens d'Anvers—McAuley shows how Jewish art collectors contended with a powerful strain of anti-Semitism: they were often accused of "invading" France's cultural patrimony. The collections these families left behind—many ultimately donated to the French state—were their response, tragic attempts to celebrate a nation that later betrayed them.

Lily Ebert and Dov Forman, Lily's promise: How I survived Auschwitz and found strength to live. BIO EBE

When Holocaust survivor Lily Ebert was liberated in 1945, a Jewish-American soldier gave her a banknote on which he'd written 'Good luck and happiness'. And when her great-grandson, Dov, decided to use social media to track down the family of the GI, 96-year-old Lily found herself making headlines round the world. Lily had promised herself that if she survived Auschwitz she would tell everyone the truth about the camp. Now was her chance.

In *Lily's Promise* she writes movingly about her happy childhood in Hungary, the death of her mother and two youngest siblings on their arrival at Auschwitz in 1944 and her determination to keep her two other sisters safe. She describes the inhumanity of the camp and the small acts of defiance that gave her strength. From there she and her sisters became slave labour in a munitions factory, and then faced a death march that they barely survived.

Lily lost so much, but she built a new life for herself and her family, first in Israel and then in London. It wasn't easy; the pain of her past was always with her, but this extraordinary woman found the strength to speak out in the hope that such evil would never happen again.

'Utterly compelling, heartbreaking, truthful and yet redemptive, a memoir of the Holocaust, a testimony of irrepressible spirit and an unforgettable family chronicle, written in lucid prose by a truly remarkable woman about her life from Hungary to Auschwitz, Israel to London. I couldn't stop reading it.' Simon Sebag Montefiore'

Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz, *The Passenger* F BOS

BEST BOOK OF 2021 FOR *THE GUARDIAN* * *FINANCIAL TIMES* * *TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT* * *MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE* * *THE TIMES*

Hailed as a remarkable literary discovery, a lost novel of heart-stopping intensity and harrowing absurdity about flight and persecution in 1930s Germany

Berlin, November 1938. Jewish shops have been ransacked and looted, synagogues destroyed. As storm troopers pound on his door, Otto Silbermann, a respected businessman who fought for Germany in the Great War, is forced to sneak out the back of his own home. Turned away from establishments he had long patronized, and fearful of being exposed as a Jew despite his Aryan looks, he boards a train.

And then another. And another . . . until his flight becomes a frantic odyssey across Germany, as he searches first for information, then for help, and finally for escape. His travels bring him face-to-face with waiters and conductors, officials and fellow outcasts, seductive women and vicious thieves, a few of whom disapprove of the regime while the rest embrace it wholeheartedly.

Clinging to his existence as it was just days before, Silbermann refuses to believe what is happening even as he is beset by opportunists, betrayed by associates, and bereft of family, friends, and fortune. As his world collapses around him, he is forced to concede that his nightmare is all too real.

Twenty-three-year-old Ulrich Boschwitz wrote *The Passenger* at breakneck speed in 1938, fresh in the wake of the Kristallnacht pogroms, and his prose flies at the same pace. Taut, immediate, infused with acerbic Kafkaesque humour, *The Passenger* is an indelible portrait of a man and a society careening out of control.

Thomas Geve and Charlie Inglefield, *The boy who drew Auschwitz* HOL GEV

'We felt an urge to document what we had witnessed. If we who had experienced it, I reasoned, did not reveal the bitter truth, people simply would not believe the extent of the Nazis' evil. I wanted to share our life, the events, and our struggle to survive.'

Thomas Geve was just 15 years old when he was liberated from Buchenwald concentration camp on 11 April 1945. It was the third concentration camp he had survived. Upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Thomas was separated from his mother and left to fend for himself in the men's camp of Auschwitz I, at the age of 13. During the 22 months he was imprisoned, he was subjected to, and forced to observe first-hand, the inhumane world of Nazi concentration camps.

On his eventual release Thomas felt compelled to capture daily life in the death camps in more than eighty profoundly moving drawings. Infamous scenarios synonymous with this dark period of history were portrayed in poignant but simplistic detail with extraordinary accuracy.

Despite the unspeakable events he experienced, Thomas decided to become an active witness and tell the truth about life in the camps. He has spoken to audiences from around the world and continues to raise awareness about the Holocaust.

The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz presents a rare living testimony through the eyes of a child who had the unique ability to observe and remember every detail around him and chose to document it all.

Mala Mackenberg, Mala's cat HOL MAC

A moving Holocaust memoir about the unlikely friendship between a young Jewish girl and a stray cat and their survival against the odds. Growing up in the Polish village of Tarnograd on the fringes of a deep pine forest, gives Mala the happiest childhood she could have hoped for. But, as the German invasion begins, her beloved village becomes a ghetto and her family and friends reduced to starvation. She takes matters into her own hands, and bravely removes her yellow star, risking sneaking out to the surrounding villages to barter for food.

It is on her way back that she sees her loved ones rounded up for deportation, and receives a smuggled letter from her sister warning her to stay away. With only her cat, Malach, and the strength of the stories taught by her family, she walks away from everything she holds dear. Malach becomes her family, her only respite from painful loneliness, a guide and reminder to stay hopeful even when faced with unfathomable darkness. With her guardian angel by her side, Mala finds a way to navigate the dangerous forests, outwit German soldiers and hostile villagers, and survive, against all odds.

Kate Quinn, The Diamond Eye F QUI

The brand-new historical novel based on a true story from the bestselling author of *The Rose Code* and *The Alice Network*

In the snowbound city of Kiev, aspiring historian Mila Pavlichenko's life revolves around her young son – until Hitler's invasion of Russia changes everything. Suddenly, she and her friends must take up arms to save their country from the Fuhrer's destruction.

Handed a rifle, Mila discovers a gift – and months of blood, sweat and tears turn the young woman into a deadly sniper: the most lethal hunter of Nazis.

Yet success is bittersweet. Mila is torn from the battlefields of the eastern front and sent to America while the war still rages. There, she finds an unexpected ally in First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and an unexpected promise of a different future.

But when an old enemy from Mila's past joins forces with a terrifying new foe, she finds herself in the deadliest duel of her life.

The Diamond Eye is a haunting novel of heroism born of desperation, of a mother who became a soldier, of a woman who found her place in the world and changed the course of history forever.