



BookMarks

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

You spoke, we listened!

What have we learned from our members? We've learned that book clubs are among the most popular programs in our sisterhoods. And so this year we have expanded our books resources and are embarking on several new initiatives. We are delighted to present **BookMarks**, the Women's League books newsletter, which will be published twice a year. This inaugural issue contains a great deal of resource material including:

- Authors Corner: interviews with three of our very own women
- Booklists of current Jewish fiction; non-fiction dealing with women and spirituality; and children's books
- Orpah's List selection for annual book club selection

Additionally, on August 19, we conducted our first Distance Workshop focusing on books; this was a conference call open to any Women's League member during which we provided specific guidelines and suggestions for starting and maintaining book clubs.

There's a lot more in store. Future plans include study guides and creative book programming. We're asking you to think "outside the book." Road trips, movie nights – anything is possible.

Remember: Books are a valuable contribution to sisterhood programming. Our motto: Building community – one reader at a time!

INTRODUCTION

Jews and books: a love affair for the millennia. Whether fiction or non-fiction, fat or thin, color or black and white – words marching across the page have the ability to teach, excite, comfort, enrage, and entertain. Reading venues are limitless: the library, living room, bedroom or yard – and for many the most anticipated: on the beach under a striped umbrella.

Despite dire prognostications, reading has not suffered death by internet, nor has the printed word been eviscerated by texting and twittering. In fact, a 2008 United States Census Bureau report ("Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy") suggests that the last quarter-century of precipitous decline in fiction reading has been reversed.

Perhaps Oprah Winfrey and Harry Potter had something to do with turning the tide for the rest of the world. But from the Middle Ages, when books first were copied by hand, to today when dog-eared copies of paperbacks pass from hand to hand – Jews have been among the most
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CALLING ALL LIBRARIANS!

We are beginning to create a database for various professions within our organization. If you, or someone in your sisterhood, hold an MLS degree, and would like to participate in a WLCJ librarians' network, please identify yourself via e-mail to International Books Chair, Illene Rubin, MSIS, at illenerubin@aol.com.

AUTHORS CORNER

MAGGIE ANTON

Author of the *Rashi's Daughters* series

How long have you been writing and how did you start?

I began writing *Rashi's Daughters* in 1997. I started studying Talmud in 1992. I became intrigued to learn that Rashi had only daughters, and did some research to see if the legends about them being learned and wearing tefillin were true. I discovered many amazing things about Jewish women's lives in medieval France and decided to write about them.

Who and what do you read?

I mostly read nonfiction as research. For pleasure I try to find time for a new novel, usually not about Jewish history.

Genre? Favorites?

Fiction is my true love. My favorite is *He, She, And It* by Marge Piercy. It covers all the genres I enjoy: science fiction, Jewish history, romance, and feminism. Other recent favorites are *Harry Potter* and *No. 1 Ladies Detective* series.

What's on your nightstand right now?

The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud by Jeffrey Rubenstein

What's your Jewish background?

I grew up in a socialist household in Los Angeles in a neighborhood where everyone was Jewish. I attended *kindershol*, where we learned Yiddish, not Hebrew, and never attended synagogue until I was an adult.

How did you research your book?

I did nearly all my research in Los Angeles, at the rabbinic libraries of HUC and AJU, and at several university libraries, as well as the Los Angeles city library. Each book contained a bibliography that sent me to new books. Physically examining the library stacks to

see which books were shelved next to the ones I wanted also lead to additional information.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

Imagining the scene that comes next. The actual writing is hard work.

Future projects?

Another historical novel about Jewish women in Babylonia in Talmudic times

Are you available for Book Club conversations?

Absolutely, either in person or speakerphone and I'm willing to do Skype too.

How do you like to reach your readers?

Readers can email me at author@rashisdaughters.com or to follow my blog at www.rashisdaughters.com.

Any messages for Conservative Jewish women/readers?

The stealth reason I wrote *Rashi's Daughters* was to encourage more women to study Talmud. These texts have been the sole province of Orthodox men for so long that the rest of us have little or no idea how Jewish law, customs and rituals evolved.

LISA KOGEN

Author of *With Strength & Splendor:*

Jewish Women as Agents of Change

How long have you been writing? How did you start?

This is a complicated question. I am not a writer/author per se; my training is as an academic which, of course, requires a great deal of writing, but the language is *academese*, not usually regarded as accessible by the reading public.

My route to this book was rather circuitous. It originated as the 2004 pictorial exhibit *Beauty, Brains & Brawn:*

The New World Balabuste that I created for Women's League in commemoration of the 350th anniversary of Jews in America. While traveling around with the exhibit, I saw that the compelling stories of these remarkable women generated great interest. The question most frequently asked was if I was going to make it into a book. Thus was born *With Strength and Splendor: Jewish Women as Agents of Change*.

Who and what do you read? Genre? Favorites? What's on your nightstand right now?

I read mostly non-fiction, history specifically, which still has the ability to quicken the pulse. I do, however, love spy novels – from Ian Fleming (James Bond) to Daniel Silva (Gabriel Allon – art restorer with license to kill). Since I have been with Women's League, I have developed a new-found appreciation for fiction. I enjoyed the Orpah's List selection *Those Who Save Us* (Jenna Blum) and recently Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Of course, I could (and, in fact, do) read over and over Colleen McCullough's *The Thornbirds* (who *doesn't* love to hate Father Ralph deBricissart – the callow, self absorbed priest), and *Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance* by Herman Wouk (who *doesn't* love Pug Henry?).

I am now reading two new works of non-fiction: *Jesus in the Talmud* by Peter Schafer and *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes* by Tamim Ansary.

Jewish background?

As would be expected, I have many years of graduate training in Jewish studies with more degrees than is necessary for any one person.

How did the women in your book "make the cut"?

For *Beauty, Brains & Brawn* the organizing principle was pragmatic: the selection was

geographically determined. I chose women who were associated with the [then] 25 branches of Women's League. In moving beyond the northeast, we could showcase women in far-flung areas who otherwise might never have garnered national attention. In this way the selection of women turned out to be much richer.

In *With Strength and Splendor*, I sought specific areas of endeavor that have (until recently) featured few women. So we have the sculptor Louise Nevelson, dean of engineering Eleanor Baum, and bio-chemist/Nobel Prize winner Gertrude Elion. The idea was to present an eclectic geographic, professional and ideological mix.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

I immensely enjoy doing the research, because the process of discovery is thrilling. Also, writing succinct essays that are both informative and analytical offers a particular challenge. I learned in high school journalism that writing a 500 word piece requires greater skill than one of 1,500 words.

Future projects?

In writing recently for *CJ* magazine, I have been doing research in the Women's League archives. They contain an abundance of untapped women's history – not only the organization's leadership and big events – but many areas of day-to-day living, what today we categorize as social history. I would love to do a project based on this archival material that offers important insights into contemporary Jewish women's history.

Are you available for Book Club conversations?

I am available for book chats and book presentations and signings for sisterhoods.

Any messages for our readers?

Keep reading! This is a difficult time for publishers, and therefore for authors.

KAREN TINTORI

Author of *Unto the Daughters: the Legacy of an Honor Killing in a Sicilian Family*.

With Jill Gregory, *The Illumination: A Novel and Book of Names*

How long have you been writing? How did you start?

I wanted to be a writer from age 12, when I got A's on my creative writing assignments. I majored in journalism, wrote for magazines and The Detroit Jewish News, and did PR. Published in 1990, my first book was a nonfiction collaboration with Rabbi E. B. Freedman and Jan Greenberg (my writing partner, aka Jill Gregory) entitled *What Does Being Jewish Mean? Read-Aloud Responses to Questions Jewish Children Ask About History, Culture and Religion*. It was reviewed by Anne Roiphe in the New York Times Book Review and also came out in a Jewish Book Club edition.

Who do you read now? What's on your nightstand?

I adore thrillers and magical realism. I've read a lot of Isabel Allende and Alice Hoffman. I'm devouring Lee Child, John Sandford, Jeffrey Deaver. One of my all time favorites is *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger, a perfect piece of literature. And Daniel Silva, whose continuing character is a Mossad agent, is at the top of my list of thriller writers.

Jewish background?

I joke that I was born by mistake into an Italian Catholic family. At 16, twelve years into a 13-year parochial education, I became disillusioned with Catholicism and began exploring its roots in Judaism. I studied with a Conservative rabbi in the days before conversion classes existed, and at 24, I was converted by an Orthodox bet din. I am a Conservative Jew, I keep kosher, and am active in Jewish and Zionist causes. I've been sisterhood president, a synagogue board member, and

on the Michigan Branch/Region and Women's League boards.

Fifteen years ago I discovered that my maiden name is a Jewish one. In 1482, Abraham ben Chayyim dei Tintori was handprinting the Torah in Bologna, not far from the town where my grandfather was born. Tintori means dyer, and Jews had the monopoly on fabric dying in northern Italy. I also just learned that the surnames of two of my paternal great-grandmothers are Jewish names.

How did you research your books?

The internet and the library are my right and left hands. I love research and I love that I can order books from distant libraries in the middle of the night from my computer. Online research has made authors' work so much easier.

But the most fun is picking experts' brains. For *The Illumination*, we spoke with scientists, physics professors, Israelis, Romans, and FBI agents. For *The Book of Names*, we studied kabbalah with two Chasidic rabbis.

For *Something Borrowed, Something Blue*, we spent two weeks in Toronto as extras in the movie "Used People." Our editor wanted to make sure our actress character was realistic.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

Telling myself "Writing is fun" on days when I've just about slit a wrist. I love polishing a chapter, toying with the language, figuring out how to say something in a richer fashion. Words intrigue me. I enjoy luring people into the world I've created by painting a picture with only words.

Future projects?

We are at work on a proposal for a multi-book series. And I am researching another nonfiction book centered on the Gold Rush. I also have an idea germinating for another Jewish-themed nonfiction book.

Are you available for book club conversations?

How do you like to reach your readers?

Absolutely, I love it! I've visited local book clubs, which I get the biggest kick out of, and have done numerous telephone call-ins with clubs across the country. There are forums on my website for all of my books, and I enjoy responding to emails sent via the website as well.

Any messages for our readers?

Jill Gregory and I are grateful for your support and for all the terrific feedback on

our Jewish hidden history thrillers. We Jews truly are people of the book, voracious readers – and critical thinkers.

Women's League has a special place in my heart and the sisterhood without walls (WLCJ.Net) is a great connector. I encourage you to join us for interesting Jewish discussions.

See you there, or at my website:
www.karentintori.com.

READING LISTS

Fiction

Anton, Maggie. *Rashi's Daughters Book III: Rachel*. Penguin Group, 2009. (Final volume of this three-part series)

Benioff, David. *City of Thieves*. Plume, 2009. (Based on Benioff's grandfather's stories about surviving WWII in Russia)

Burr, Chandler. *You or Someone Like You*. Harper Collins, 2009. (Anne Rosenbaum's Hollywood book club of classic literature becomes the *in* group and an engine for Hollywood decision-making.)

Cameron, Michelle. *Fruit of Her Hands; The Story of Shira Ashkenaz*. Simon and Schuster, 2009. (Based on the life of the author's ancestor, Meir ben Baruch of Rothenberg, the famous rabbinic scholar in 13th century northern Europe)

Diamant, Anita. *Day After Night*. Scribner, 2009. (The October 1945 rescue of over 200 prisoners from the British-run Atlit internment camp, north of Haifa)

Galant, Debra. *Fear and Yoga in New Jersey*. St. Martin's/Griffen, 2009. (Suburban family satire)

Gallinger, Donald. *Master Planets*. Kunati, 2009. (Budding rock star explores his

family history, providing an unusual perspective on themes of survival, revenge, denial, family loyalty and the inevitability of suffering among second generation Holocaust survivors.)

Goldreich, Gloria. *Open Doors*. Mira, 2008. (Elaine Gordon tries to reconnect with her adult children after her husband passes away.)

Graff, Laurie. *Shiksa Syndrome*. Broadway Books, 2008. (Single Manhattan woman pretends to be a non-Jew in order to meet the perfect Jewish man.)

Halberstam, Joshua. *Seat at the Table: A Novel of Forbidden Choices*. Sourcebooks Landmark, 2009. (The son of a chassidic rabbi slowly disengages physically and emotionally from his religious life and isolated community.)

Hareven, Gail and Dalya Bilu. *Confessions of Noa Weber*. Melville House, 2009. (Tale of a woman's obsessive love for one man, based in modern Israel)

Horn, Dara. *All Other Nights*. W.W. Norton, 2009. (Jewish soldier/spy for the Union during the Civil War)

Kirschenbaum, Binnie. *Scenic Route*. Harper Perennial, 2009. (In this novel of self discovery, a 42-year-old woman leaves her life in New York to travel.)

Klein, Zoe. *Drawing in the Dust*. Simon and Schuster, 2009. (Couple enters the world of biblical excavation and discovers what they think is Jeremiah's grave.)

Manseau, Peter. *Songs for the Butcher's Daughter*. Free Press, 2009. (Story of fictional Yiddish poet Itzik Malpesh, born in Kishinev in 1903)

Ragen, Naomi. *Saturday Wife*. St. Martin's/Griffin, 2008. ("Jewish chick lit" with a message centers around the story of Delilah Goldfarb and her husband, the rabbi of a wealthy Connecticut congregation.)

Rothstein, Gidon. *Cassandra Misreads the Book of Samuel and Other Untold Tales of the Prophets*. Booksurge, 2008. (Rabbinic author creates midrash for Bible stories.)

Rozan, S.J. *Shanghai Moon*. Minotaur Books, 2009. (Mystery/thriller weaving back and forth between WWII China and contemporary New York City)

Silva, Daniel. *The Defector*. Putnam Adult, 2009. (Ninth in series about Israeli assassin and art restorer, Gabriel Allon)

Stone, Joel. *Jerusalem File*. Europe Editions, 2009. (Mystery/character study of retired Israeli security officer who accepts assignments threatening to his ethical beliefs)

Tintori, Karen and Jill Gregory. *Illumination*. St. Martin's Press, 2009. (Thriller weaves history, ancient art, dark legend, and religious fanaticism into story of international intrigue.)

Wiesel, Elie. *Mad Desire to Dance*. Knopf, 2009. (Doriel's search for meaning to his life leads him to examine faith, religion, mysticism, survivors' testimony, and Holocaust records.)

Non-Fiction: Women's Spirituality

Cohn, Dr. Tamara and Rabbi Andrea Weiss. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*. URJ Press, 2007.

Drucker, Malka. *Women and Judaism* (Women and Religion in the World). Praeger, 2009. (Anthology exploring Judaism for modern women, including Bible, ethics, and ritual, social and cultural innovation)

Goldstein, Elyse, ed. *The Women's Haftarah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly Haftarah Portions, the 5 Megillot & Special Shabbatot*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.

Goldstein, Elyse, ed. *The Women's Torah Commentary: New insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.

Hirsch, Sherre. *We Plan, God Laughs: What to Do When Life Hits You Over the Head*. Doubleday, 2008. (Rabbi Hirsh, spiritual life consultant for Canyon Ranch, presents ten basic steps for formulating workable plans for daily living.)

Lavie, Aliza. *Jewish Woman's Prayer Book*. Spiegel & Grau, 2008.

Ochs, Vanessa L. *Inventing Jewish Ritual*. Jewish Publication Society of America, 2007.

Sacks, Jonathan. *The Koren Sacks Siddur* (English Edition). Koren, 2009. (Edited by the Chief Rabbi of London, this siddur displays more feminist sensibilities than other Orthodox siddurim. Prayers are included for the birth of a daughter, for women to recite upon returning to synagogue after giving birth.)

Umansky, Ellen M. and Dianne Ashton. *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook*. Brandeis, (New edition) 2008.

Children's Books

Musleah, Rahel. *Apples and Pomegranates: A Rosh Hashanah Seder*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (Sephardic Rosh Hashanah; includes blessings, songs, folktales, and recipes). All ages

Young Children

Jules, Jacqueline. *Goodnight Sh'ma*, Kar-Ben, 2009. (board book) Ages 1-4

Knopf, Latifa Berry. *It's Shofar Time*, Kar-Ben, 2009. (Introduction to Rosh Hashanah) Ages 2-6

Jules, Jacqueline. *The Hardest Word — A Yom Kippur Story*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (Introduction to Yom Kippur) Ages 3-7

Marzel, Pepi. *My First Hebrew Word Book*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (Hebrew vocabulary book) Ages 4-8

Ganz, Yaffa. *Four In One! Four Favorites*. Feldheim, 2008. (Collection: *The Gift That Grew; Yedidya and the Esrog Tree; Me and My Bubby, My Zeidy and Me; and Teasers, Twisters, Strumpers*) Ages 5-12

Greene, Jacqueline Dembar. *The Secret Shofar of Barcelona*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (High holidays in Inquisition Spain) Ages 5-9

Rouss, Sylvia. *Sammy Spider's First Rosh Hashanah*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (Rosh Hashanah tale) Ages 3-8

Rouss, Sylvia. *Sammy Spider's First Sukkot*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (Sukkot tale) Ages 3-8

Sher, Steven. *Where the Shouting Began*. Montemayor Press, 2009. (Stories with Jewish/ethical content; good for parent/child discussions) Age 6+ (with parent)

Sussman, Kibort. *My First Yiddish Word Book*. Kar-Ben, 2009. (Yiddish vocabulary) Ages 4-8

Wormell, Christopher. *The Animals Came Two by Two*. Running Press, 2008. (Beautifully illustrated account of Noah's ark) Ages 3-8

Pre-Teen

Anton, Maggie. *Rashi's Daughter, Secret Scholar*. JPS, 2008. (Historical novel of Rashi's daughter, Joheved; companion to the adult *Rashi's Daughters*) Ages 10+

Cohen, Deborah Bodin. *Lilith's Ark — Teenage Tales of Biblical Women*. JPS, 2006. (Blends historic experiences with those of modern girls and women; includes study guide) Ages 12+

Kacer, Kathy. *The Diary of Laura's Twin*. Second Story Press, 2008. (Story of an American girl and her bat mitzvah symbolic twin, a victim of the Holocaust) Ages 11+

Lezotte, Ann Clare. *T4: A Novel*. Houghlin Mifflin, 2008. (Novel, written in verse, of deaf child who hides out when the Nazi government initiates Action T4) Ages 12+

O'Connell, Rebecca. *Penina Levine Is a Potato Pancake*. Roaring Brook Press, 2008. (Penina's grandparents turn Chanukkah into a happy celebration.) Ages 8-11

Silverberg, Selma Kritzer. *Naomi's Song*. JPS, 2009. (Modern day midrash of Naomi's life before Ruth) Ages 12+

Watts, Irene N. *Good-bye Marianne*. Tundra, 2008. (Graphic novel adaptation of Irene Watt's novel about the life of 11-year old Marianne's after Kristallnacht) Ages 9-12

Young Adult

Baskin, Nora Raleigh. *The Truth About My Bat Mitzvah*. Aladdin, 2009. (Twelve-year-old Caroline, raised in a non-religious home, develops an increased desire to become bat mitzvah after her beloved grandmother dies.)

Fischer, Chuck, Curtis Flowers and Bruce Foster. *In the Beginning: The Art of Genesis*. Little, Brown & Co, 2008. (Pop-up art book uses artwork to analyze stories from Genesis.)

Knauer, Kelly, ed. *Rutka's Notebook*. Time/Yad Vashem, 2008. (14-year-old Rutka Laskier lived her brief life in a small Polish town before being deported to Aushwitz where she died. Her recently uncovered diary describes the everyday lives and escalating horror of Jews living under the Nazis in Eastern Europe.)

Kogen, Lisa. *With Strength And Splendor: Jewish Women as Agents of Change*. WLCJ, 2008. (Biographies and photos of 47 extraordinary women who transcended social, economic, and cultural barriers)

Levine, Anna. *Freefall*. Greenwillow Books, 2008. 2009 Sydney Taylor Honor Book. (Israeli teen enters the army.)

Levy, Marilyn. *Checkpoints*. JPS, 2008. (A complex and heart-breaking story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lives of real families)

Roth, Matthue. *Losers*. PUSH, Scholastic, Inc., 2008. (A 15-year-old Russian émigré's adjustment to high school)

Orpah's List 2009 Selection

November: Jewish Book Month

People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks

The complete study guide with questions and color images from the Sarajevo Haggadah is available at www.wlcj.org.

To obtain hard copy, phone Maxine Frye, 212.870.1260 ext. 7165.

Introduction

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ardent readers. It is a lifelong passion for many of us. Albert Einstein's children reported that when he had no book at breakfast, he read the back of the cereal box.

In Women's League, where our activities speak to a broad array of tastes and concerns, we generally are united in our love of reading.

And so we are initiating **BookMarks**, piloted by the guiding hand and expertise of Books Chair Illene Rubin, a professional librarian and unabashed book lover. We look to our membership for future resources and recommendations. **BookMarks** will appear twice this year and on the Women's League website www.wlcj.org.

We are excited about this new venture, and we look to you to read, critique and recommend.

To paraphrase Lenore Hershey's comment: "Do give books – religious or otherwise – for Chanukkah. They're never fattening, seldom sinful, and permanently personal."



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