



BookMarks

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

SPECIAL CONVENTION ISSUE

Kehillah Kedoshah: Celebrating Community Woman to Woman

Dedicated by Illene and Warren Rubin

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY READER TO READER

We **celebrate** the second year of our Women's League semi-annual publication! The response to **BookMarks** has been overwhelming. It is quite evident that book clubs are an integral part of sisterhood programming and that our resources have been welcomed by our women. We, therefore, have worked very hard to expand the books agenda for this convention.

We **celebrate** the wonderful authors who are joining us at convention to share their stories. All are Conservative Jews and still such a variety – truly something for all ages and interests, a potpourri of topics that ranges from cookbooks to spirituality to Israeli politics to modern fiction. Be sure to check the program for the exact times and places to meet these authors. We are proud to present in-depth interviews with three of them in **BookMarks**.

We **celebrate** our incoming Women's League officers! They have told **BookMarks** their personal favorites – get to know your officers through the books that they read.

We **celebrate** the wonderful women who create and lead so many book clubs throughout Women's League and are happy to provide you with the necessary resources, including book lists, discussion guidelines, and publicity materials. We continue to provide ideas for those of you who have active reading groups, as well as for those of you who are just beginning to venture into this very worthwhile endeavor. We invite everyone to attend our programs throughout the week and welcome you into our community of readers. **Celebrate!**

BOOKS: CONVENTION AND BEYOND

An embarrassment of riches. This is the only possible description of the varied and engaging book opportunities at our 2010 Convention. As our Books Chair Illene Rubin says, our response to the growing popularity (and diversity) of our hundreds of book groups is obvious, not only through our ongoing Women's League book initiatives, but also throughout the four days of convention.

We have our yearly offering of Orpah's List, this year Sara Houghteling's beautifully evocative novel, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, about a Parisian family of Jewish art dealers during and after World War II (full discussion guide is available on the WLCJ website).

Also hot off the press is convention issue of **BookMarks**, which contains interviews with several of the authors who are presenting at convention.

Author's Salon: Each afternoon we will host invited authors to a formal presentation and book signing. This year, meet Meredith Jacobs, Jennifer Gilmore, Rabbi Naomi Levy, Tina Wasserman, and Joan Leegant.

Author's Corner: Authors will be featured at tables where they can discuss, one-on-one, their books with delegates, and sell and sign them as well.



AUTHORS CORNER

The Modern Jewish Mom's Guide to Shabbat: Connect and Celebrate – Bring Your Family Together with the Friday Night Meal, by Meredith Jacobs

Getting everything done in a 24-hour period seems impossible. After working, shuttling the kids to soccer practice, attending PTA meetings, taking the dog to the vet, and organizing a charity event, who has time to bake challah? In this delightful book Meredith Jacobs, the ultimate modern mom, shows how Shabbat is one of the best ways to bring your family closer in spite of a hectic schedule.

In this must-have guide filled with helpful tips, recipes, prayers, and discussion questions, Jacobs brings Shabbat home with a refreshing and modern twist. Whether you were born and raised Jewish, are in an interfaith marriage, a Jew by choice, or simply want to bring more tradition to your family and into your home, *The Modern Jewish Mom's Guide to Shabbat* is perfect for you. Comprehensive, useful, and written in an engaging and conversational tone – this hands-on guide will help keep this age-old ritual alive.

BookMarks interview with Meredith Jacobs

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

I feel like I've been writing forever. My parents have recordings of me reciting little poems and stories I would make up when I was too young to write. I was always the kid at school who was the writer. My first professional writing experience was for my synagogue's sisterhood! They asked me to write a poem for their Mother's Day brunch. Who would have guessed so many years later, I'd be speaking at the Women's League convention!

But, for all of that, I never dreamed of actually becoming an author. As I got older, I seemed to lose my ability to think and to write fiction. Maybe this is why I went into PR. I wrote speeches for other people to give and press releases. Once I became a mom and got involved in my children's synagogue pre-school, I found myself writing articles for the newsletter and

giving speeches on Back-to-School night encouraging parents to do more Jewishly, to use our traditions to raise strong families. One thing led to another and *The Modern Jewish Mom's Guide to Shabbat* (and the whole "Modern Jewish Mom" thing) just kind of happened.

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

I read everything, although I have a hard time reading sad – it stays with me. One of the best things my husband did was to take the TV out of our bedroom. Now, rather than watching, I read. I finally got around to reading *The Book Thief*, that my daughter told me was her favorite book ever and I am so grateful because it is achingly beautiful. It is brilliant and creative and original. Before that was *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, which I bought because I couldn't resist the title and I honestly couldn't understand what all the fuss was about until I got to the end, and then fell in love with it. I also just finished *On Beauty*, by Zaide Smith, which surprised me, by how much I enjoyed it. Every once in a while, I need something just fun and junky, anything in the *Shopaholic* series or *Twilight* (which again, I blame/thank my daughter for). Now I'm enjoying *Talking to Girls About Duran Duran*. How could anyone who grew up in the 80s resist that title?

What is your Jewish background? How has it impacted your writing?

Born and raised Conservative. I grew up at Temple Sinai in Dresher, PA. My rabbi was Rabbi Sidney Greenberg, who wrote *Likrat Shabbat* (the siddur used by Conservative congregations on Friday night). I was active in Kadima and USY. I was a Hebrew School tutor (I even wrote about my experience as a tutor for my college essay!) And, surprisingly, I was a member of the children's choir and sang on the bimah every Saturday morning. My late uncle, Saul Hammerman, was the chazzan for Congregation Beth El in Baltimore, MD, and was a past president of the Cantor's Assembly. The synagogue

was a very comfortable place for me, a second home.

My parents were very active in the synagogue. They set the example for me. There was no question that when I grew up, I would not only join a synagogue, but that I would be a leader. Who would have guessed that being a synagogue volunteer and board member would lead to my writing career? It was a series of workshops I created with my rabbi called Make Friday Night Shabbat that inspired the book.

What do you see as the value of Jewish literature and how do you define it?

It seems cliché to say we're "the people of the book", but we are, and not just because of our sacred books. We are an expressive, creative people. Jewish books are integral to who we are. I love that Jews buy more books per capita than any other group. I love what that says about us, about our priorities.

I teach a Mothers Circle, a class created by the Jewish Outreach Institute for non-Jewish women who are raising Jewish children (their husbands are Jewish). Since these women didn't grow up in Jewish homes, but are now creating one, we teach them what it really means to create a Jewish home and raise Jewish children. There is a session when we discuss the physical things that are found in a Jewish home, Shabbat candlesticks, a menorah. Books are included in that list.

Why did you write this book?

A friend was visiting the week the Washington Jewish Week published a front page story about my Shabbat workshop series. When I showed her the article, she said her young sons were asking for a Shabbat dinner and although she was born and raised Jewish, she really didn't know what that meant. She was sure other moms were in similar situations and suggested I take my show on the road and travel around the country leading workshops on Shabbat. My children were in nursery school at the time so I wasn't going to travel like that. So she suggested I write a book.

I didn't hesitate to jump on the idea. Adding Friday night dinner to my family's routine had

meant so much to us, it was something I felt passionately about sharing. My husband was incredibly supportive. Everything just flowed from there. I found a wonderful agent and she sold the project to HarperCollins within six weeks of the proposal going out.

What's the message that you would like readers to take away from this book? Who is your audience?

The more I learn about our teachings and traditions, the more I realize the brilliance in the thinking that went into creating our rituals. As Jewish women, we have an incredible tool box. I find time in my busy schedule to have a Friday night dinner every week with my family not because I'm "commanded to" (although I know that's supposed to be the reason). I do it because it's no longer so simple, it's no longer a given, that we'll have dinner together. As modern families, to have one night where we sit at a candle-lit table and talk to each other and really connect, this is a gift! Blessing the children, eating warm challah, drinking wine, talking, talking, talking...we're lucky to have these traditions as part of our heritage.

How did you research your book?

I did want to make certain it was halachically correct. Although I'll admit things in my book like lighting candles after the sun has set, it was important to me that the book teach what we're really supposed to do. I spoke with rabbis and more observant women, and read as many resources as I could find. But what was most important for me when I was starting to incorporate Shabbat into my life and what I believe makes my book different, were the ideas I got from other moms. Ideas like how to make challah every week or how to get a nice dinner on the table when you've worked all day, or how to get teenagers to stay home or even to forget about saying the blessing over the children in Hebrew and just use that moment every week to tell our children how much we love them and how special they are to us.

Did you encounter any surprises along the way?

Surprises like "the more I know, the more I realize I don't know." I didn't know that the

rituals we do at our Shabbat table came from the rituals performed by the ancient priests in the Temple. I like knowing that Jewish women are tasked with what was once the domain of the high priests. I also wanted to include easy-to-read and understand synopsis of each *parashah* and offer suggested table discussions in my book so I read the Torah. I have the *chumash* from my bat mitzvah and I read it through and, honestly, it was the best part of my research! I loved reading all the sections they don't teach you in Hebrew School. Full of intrigue and scandal...quite the racy book.

Surprises from the process of becoming an author are the emails I get from readers. Everything from Friday afternoon emergency "My challah dough didn't rise, what should I do?" to thank you notes. They're inspiring and humbling.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

Being so focused on what I'm writing that time disappears. I love when I'm really into it and the words and thoughts pour out. For me, the hardest part is thinking about what I want to say. Once I have the idea, I write like I talk (and I talk a lot!)

Future projects?

My daughter and I have a new book that was published this past May. *Just between Us: A No-Stress, No-Rules Journal for Girls and Their Moms* (Chronicle Books). I have proposals out for a parent-son journal (co-written with my son) and a follow-up to *The Modern Jewish Mom's Guide to Shabbat* about holidays.

Are you available for Book Club conversations? How do you like to reach your readers?

Yes! If you're in the DC/MD/VA area, we could meet in person or I'm available by phone, email or Skype. (Just email me at Meredith@modernjewishmom.com)

Any messages for Conservative Jewish women readers?

I love being a Conservative Jew. I worry that the Reform and Orthodox movements seem to pull at us, pull us away. I don't want Conservative Judaism to disappear. When I was running the Make Friday Night Shabbat series, I read a

column in CJ Magazine that said what Conservative Jews must do to save our movement is celebrate all the good our traditions bring us. While I tried to keep my book non-denominational, I think it comes through that I am a Conservative Jewish woman. If my book inspires other Conservative Jewish women to bring more of our traditions into our homes and celebrate being Conservative Jews, that's what it's all about.

Hope Will Find You, by Rabbi Naomi Levy

How can I get my life off hold? When will my life really begin? We all ask ourselves the same questions when we are struggling to move forward. As a rabbi, Naomi Levy frequently offered spiritual guidance to people seeking the answers. But when a doctor told her that her young daughter, Noa, had a fatal degenerative disease, Rabbi Levy's own insights could not prevent her whole life from unraveling.

In *Hope Will Find You*, Levy shares her journey. She describes with humor and honesty how she came through a time of uncertainty and fear and learned how to stop waiting for life to begin. A natural storyteller, Levy has written a book filled with invaluable lessons for living in the present and for opening the door to an extraordinary future. *Hope Will Find You* is a book that will be passed to friends when life gets confusing, a book that will rest on our bedside tables when we are searching for hope.

BookMarks interview with Naomi Levy

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

I never saw myself as a writer. In fact, when I was in rabbinical school I was so intimidated by the thought of taking homiletics (sermon writing) that I begged my dean to excuse me from the course. I promised I would never be a congregational rabbi and there was no need for me to write sermons. He agreed and didn't force me to take the course.

In the end, of course, I did become a congregational rabbi. And I found that I loved writing sermons. I loved writing about the lessons I had learned from my own congregants. Their stories

moved and inspired me. Soon writing became my passion. I saw that I could strengthen people, inspire and comfort people with my words.

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

I love fiction. I love biography and short stories, too. Some of my all time favorite books: *Of Mice and Men*, *As a Driven Leaf*, *Ulysses*, *American Pastoral*, the *Zuckerman Trilogy*, anything by I.B. Singer, everything by Abraham Joshua Heschel. On my nightstand right now: *Winter's Bone* by Daniel Woodrell, *Fingerprints of God* by Barbara Bradley Hagerty, *Life* by Keith Richards

What is your Jewish background? How has it impacted your writing?

I knew I wanted to be a rabbi from the time I was 3 or 4 years old. Everyone laughed and thought that was adorable, but I was deadly serious. I grew up in a hasidic neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY. I attended the Orthodox Yeshiva of Flatbush High School. I didn't reveal my longing to be a rabbi at school. I felt a lot of shame around my longing which I new would be a source of ridicule or worse. But my father taught me at home to believe in myself. He supported my dream. The home my parents raised me in was a place filled with a rich love for Yiddishkeit, for Jewish music, learning, prayer, family and food!

When I was 15 my father was murdered in a street mugging. As you can imagine, so many things died at that time. In some ways God died, too. I couldn't understand how the God I believed in so deeply would permit such a horrible thing to happen to such a wonderful man. And I walked around feeling lost and angry for some time until I realized it was my understanding of God that had caused me to hate God. Perhaps God wasn't Superman. Perhaps God wasn't in the evil prevention business. Once I started seeing God with new eyes I could stop hating God and start listening to God. A dream that had died within me was resurrected. And I became a rabbi! I was in the first class of women to enter the Jewish Theological Seminary. For me it was like completing a circle. It was like coming home.

My Jewish background and my passion for helping people who have been hurt by life, people who struggle with faith and God inform my writing. My writing has been about finding ways to connect with God, finding ways to heal and find comfort and strength. In *Hope Will Find You* I write about ways to stop waiting for life to begin, ways to embrace this imperfect life and find blessings and hope right where we are.

What do you see as the value of Jewish literature and how do you define it?

I define Jewish literature as a work written by a Jewish author that addresses a Jewish theme, a Jewish state of mind, a Jewish take on reality, a Jewish environment.

Why did you write this book?

I wrote *Hope Will Find You* because I spent years counseling people who kept saying to me, "Rabbi, my life will begin when..." My life will begin when I lose weight, when I fall in love, when I have a baby, when I get this job, when I... And one day a doctor phoned to tell us our daughter had a fatal degenerative disease. Life stopped. I stopped writing, teaching, lecturing, counseling. Suddenly I became one of those people waiting for life to begin. *Hope Will Find You* traces a seven year journey with my daughter Noa. It shares lessons I learned about living with uncertainty. About ways I learned to stop waiting and start living.

Hope Will Find You is filled with mentors and teachings about recognizing the blessings of the imperfect life we live every single day.

What's the message that you would like readers to take away from this book? Who is your audience?

I pray that *Hope Will Find You* will offer people a road from waiting to living, a path from uncertainty to clarity. I pray that I have explained what it means to find blessings even in an imperfect situation, to find grace in the wilderness. I pray my readers will understand what it means to stop striving for hope, and instead to relax and let hope in, to believe that hope is searching for us!

How did you research your book?

I spent seven years living with a cloud of uncertainty hanging my head and in that time I found mentors in unlikely places. A homeless man became my teacher. A saleswoman in a boutique. I write about a vision I once had of an angel. But most of all, my greatest mentor in those dark days was my own wise child who taught me how to pray, how to believe.

Did you encounter any surprises along the way?

My greatest surprises were the doors that opened. I met a minister who became my sister in faith. A bird taught me to stop hitting my head against the wall. I met bald men in a waiting room who offered me a prophecy of hope.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

There are days when writing comes in drips and drabs, when I have to write and rewrite and edit. And then there are days when something comes like a gift from heaven. I love those days.

Are you available for Book Club conversations? How do you like to reach your readers?

I love discussing my books. I travel to visit some book clubs who can bring me out. I also speak via Skype and speaker phone. There are book clubs that discuss my book over a single session, where we focus on themes and lessons in a single evening. And there are book clubs that take on the lessons of *Hope Will Find You* and strive to incorporate them into their lives over a several week workshop.

Any messages for Conservative Jewish women readers?

I hope that women will learn about the roots of NASHUVA, an organization I founded to reach out to unaffiliated Jews and offer them a spiritual path back to Judaism and to link a spiritual path with acts of justice. NASHUVA is now bringing thousands of Jews back to Jewish life through live webcasts of services and through the training of rabbis and cantors.

I also hope the women of Conservative Judaism will learn a new approach to Jewish mysticism, to prayer and faith and God and Torah from my book.

Wherever You Go, by Joan Leegant

Joan Leegant, the winner of the PEN New England Book Award and the Edward Lewis Wallant Award, and a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award, weaves together three lives caught in the grip of a volatile and demanding faith. Emotionally wrenching and unmistakably timely, *Wherever You Go* shines a light on one of the most disturbing elements in Israeli society: Jewish extremist groups and their threat to the modern, democratic state.

Yona Stern has traveled from New York to make amends with her estranged sister, a stoic ideologue and mother of five who has dedicated herself to the radical West Bank settlement cause. Yona's personal life, consisting of serial liaisons with married men and a stalled ambition to become a painter, resembles nothing of her sister's, but it isn't politics that drove the two apart.

Now a respected Jerusalem Talmud teacher, Mark Greenglass was once a drug dealer saved by an eleventh-hour turn to Orthodox Judaism. But for reasons he can't understand, he's lost his religious passion. Is he through with God? Is God through with him? Enter Aaron Blinder, a dropout with a history of failure whose famous father endlessly mines the Holocaust for his best-selling, melodramatic novels. Desperate for approval, Aaron finds a home on the violent fringe of Israeli society, with unforeseen and devastating consequences.

BookMarks Interview with Joan Leegant

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

I began writing poetry as a child. It was a natural impulse: I liked to read, I loved rhymes, and I liked the solitude while writing poems alone in the backyard or in my room, discovering my thoughts and feelings through words. But it was semi-closeted and not something I thought of as a vocation. Though we did, in fact, have one poet in the family: Allen Ginsberg was my father's cousin. I met him only once, after a reading he gave. I was a young teenager. He asked my father to bring him a pastrami sandwich backstage which seemed strange since he'd just

spent an hour doing Buddhist chants.

In any case, I became a lawyer. But I continued to write poems and songs and essays. Finally, just before I turned 40, I began to write short stories at first. I was hooked. This year I turned 60. So I've been writing for almost 20 years!

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

I read a lot of contemporary fiction, mostly American. I also read Israeli fiction in translation, especially David Grossman but also A.B. Yehoshua, Savyon Liebrecht, Etgar Keret. I'm just starting work on a new novel, so am hungrily devouring other novels, which I read for their variety and voices, not to imitate but because I find it exhilarating. Reading helps me tap into that sense of possibility, the joy of discovering a story. It makes me want to jump in and get to work discovering and uncovering my own next story. So right now I'm reading widely and promiscuously. On my nightstand: *Tinkers* by Paul Harding, which won the Pulitzer Prize this year, a meditation about a dying old man in New England and an amazing side story about the circumstances of its publication; *Where You Once Belonged* by Kent Haruf, a master of restraint; *Never Let Me Go*, chilling and beautiful, by Kazuo Ishiguro; *The Frozen Rabbi* another uproarious ride by Steve Stern. I have a stack of other novels that I'll look at to see how they're structured or what points of view the writers use; in other words, for their technique.

What is your Jewish background? How has it impacted your writing?

I was raised on Long Island and went to a Conservative synagogue. My family wasn't particularly observant – I think they joined for the sake of the kids – but I loved going to services. I liked the singing, I liked the rabbi's sermons, the ritual and regularity. I even liked Hebrew School, which was pretty weird. But, like a lot of young adults, especially in the late 1960s, I didn't want much to do with religion in college or graduate school.

That all changed in my late 20s. I went to Israel for the first time at 27, already a lawyer, on

an American Jewish Congress tour with my mother and about 20 other middle-aged ladies. It was 1977, and I was smitten with the country. The following year I went back for what I thought would be a six-month stint. I stayed for three years. I worked, learned Hebrew, went to the Pardes Institute to immerse in religious study, opened myself up to the question of what it meant to be Jewish. When I began writing fiction a decade or so later, all that material began to pour into the stories. It became the subject matter. I'm still mining it.

Why did you write this book?

I wanted to write a novel about Israel, and about young Americans in Israel, because I'm very interested in young Americans in Israel: what they do when they get there, the pushes and pulls, the influences and drives and passions they experience or discover. This is probably because I was once a young American in Israel and met a lot of others like me during those years. I felt as though I were peeling away layers of myself, like an onion. So when I began writing this novel I didn't have a particular theme or issue in mind, and certainly no agenda. I just wanted to explore my invented people. Like many fiction writers, I start with characters and a situation, and I go where the characters take me.

That said, it's no accident that the characters I chose to follow took me straight into the heart of some very charged and sensitive political issues, particularly the issue of Jewish religious and political extremism.

Since 2007, I've lived half the year in Tel Aviv where I'm the Visiting Writer at Bar-Ilan University and teach fiction writing. I also lecture at Israeli teachers colleges for the U.S. State Department. I see a lot of the country and hear what people are talking about. Jewish extremism is discussed constantly in newspapers, on television, in documentaries. The influence of the hard-line settlement movement on Israeli politics, the dangers it poses to Israel's democracy, its effect on efforts to make peace with the Palestinians, and its costs – financial, moral and ethical – these are of grave concern to many Israelis.

The attraction this ideology holds for young

American Jews is something I wanted to explore through my fiction: what in American Jewish life might push a young person in that direction? What drives people to attach themselves to certain causes, and to justify violence? Religious extremism is all over the globe, possibly the main defining element of the 21st century. Why people are drawn to it interests and worries me, and I think interests and worries many others as well.

How did you research the book?

Immersion, reading, and visiting specific places. Immersion is my living in Israel for long periods and being part of the fabric of life even as an outsider and an American. Reading involved both scholarly material on the rise of radical extremism in Israel, particularly the work of Ehud Sprinzak, as well as current reportage. Lastly, I visited locations in Israel and the West Bank at various stages of the manuscript to see if what I imagined was accurate and to get additional sensory details.

Who is your audience?

I don't write with an audience in mind. If I did, I'd probably censor myself and write nothing at all. I aim only to write a book that feels true and honest and authentic, and which I hope matters. I think about the audience only when it's done and the publisher has it and I have to think about promoting it. Now that the book is out, though, I've found that the audience is anyone who wants to know more about modern Israel, who wants a fuller picture of what is happening there, and who is interested and willing to look closely at some troubling aspects of American Jewish life. So I'm very happy to see that readers have been greatly engaged by the book and its concerns.

What's the message you want readers to take away from this book?

One of the reviewers described the book as "a cautionary tale about the danger of a narrow ideology" (*The Times Literary Supplement*). I am hoping readers will come away with a greater understanding of the ideological forces at work in Israel, and a greater feeling for the costs and dangers of adhering to a narrow ideology. There's

a quote attributed to Robert Kennedy that seems particularly apt: "What is objectionable, what is dangerous about extremists, is not that they are extreme, but that they are intolerant. The evil is not what they say about their cause, but what they say about their opponents." I hope readers will have had an experience while reading this book that makes that sentiment feel true.

Do you base your characters on anyone you know?

They are a lot *like* people I've known or known about, or they have familiar psychological drives. For instance, Aaron Blinder is a failure in his father's eyes and is looking for approval. Who doesn't know someone with that psychic legacy? It's been with us since Cain and Abel. So though I may not know anyone with Aaron's particular life story, I know something about his emotional core. And I want to know more, which is why I write about it. That's how it is with all the characters. I write about those dynamics through the stories of made-up people. This allows me to plumb the emotions without having to stick to the facts of any real person's life.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

I could say something like typing the words "The End." But that's not really true. My favorite part is at the very beginning, when I'm making things up and writing without worrying how things will fit together. There's a kind of joyous exhilaration when you're writing without being concerned about the end result, when you're just generating the raw material.

Future projects?

I've started a new novel, currently set in central Massachusetts. Very early stage, just generating the raw material.

Available for Book Club conversations?

I'm happy to speak with book clubs via Skype if time and scheduling allow.

Any messages for Conservative Jewish women readers?

Women and readers who identify as Conservative Jews occupy a critically important position vis-à-vis the questions in this book regarding religious and political extremism. Conservative

Jews have an attachment to and appreciation of Israel; many have a deep personal knowledge and understanding of the country. At the same time, Conservative Jews are rightly worried about the country's shift to the right and the threat to Israel's democracy and the rule of law posed by the hard-line settlement movement. It seems to

me to be more pressing than ever for Conservative Jews to gain a nuanced and complete picture of the forces at work within Israeli society. Those who want to maintain a democratic country that respects the rights and identities of all its citizens should be supported and strengthened.

OUR OFFICERS' PICKS

Cory Schneider: I love the Daniel Silva books. Following the character from book to book brings continuity and familiarity. My next favorite book is *Baxter, the Pig Who Wanted to Be Kosher* by Laurel Snyder. The kids love the story and it helps them appreciate the value of Shabbat dinner.

Rita Wertlieb: One of the best books I read this summer was *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, not Jewish but dealt with racial bias in the south in the 1950s. Very insightful and moving story, especially as I grew up in Washington, DC where segregation in the 50s was the norm. I can vividly remember not being allowed to go to certain beaches on the Chesapeake Bay that were closed to "Jews, Colored and Dogs." This was the exact wording on the sign. Can you imagine?!

Gloria Adelson: I'm reading *The Finkler Question* by Howard Jacobson. It's the winner of the 2010 Man Book Prize. So far, so good.

Sandy Berenbaum: There are many books that I enjoy reading. Some favorites are anything by Naomi Ragen and Philip Roth, *Just Revenge* by Alan Dershowitz, *Drawing In The Dust* by Zoe Klein, *Snow In August* by Pete Hamill and *Exodus* by Leon Uris.

Phyllis Goldberg: I love to travel and I love to read. When these interests overlap, presenting not only a good read but also a wonderful Jewish historical background, I am thrilled. *Rashi's Daughters* (all three books), by Maggie Anton, and *Sarah's Key*, by Tatiana de Rosnay, enriched my time in France. I am sure that *Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*, by

Lucette Lagnado, with its vivid portrayal of old Jewish Cairo will deeply color January's visit to Egypt.

Shelly Goldin: Best titles depended on milestones. As a teenager I thought *Exodus* by Leon Uris was my number one, until I read *Madame Bovary*. Right now the books that moved me most are *As a Driven Leaf* by Milton Steinberg and *The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon.

Janet Kirschner: *Ten Thousand Lovers* by Edeet Ravel, the first novel by an Israeli-born Canadian woman about a young woman's love affair with an Israeli army interrogator. Several years old but one of my all-time favorites.

Iris Lasky: There are a few books that I always go back to from my teen years that may have helped to change my direction, and the one that I will go with is *Exodus*. It was 1958, and I had just finished a term paper on the Holocaust, having to go through boxes of photos and documents in the library since no major books had been written and I then read *Exodus*. I knew immediately that my support of Israel would always be with me.

Toby Maser: While many Jews learn Torah on a Shabbat morning, few make the commitment to look at Scripture beyond the five books of the Torah. "Hillel stated, Do not say 'When I have time I will study.'..." Recently our rabbi challenged us to commit to reading two chapters (no more-no less) each day. It will take about a year and a half. I started on November 1st. A long way to go. . .

Harriet Merkwowitz: I find it difficult to pick one book, but my favorite Israeli writer was Batya Gur. Her mysteries are wonderful. I read anything by Julie Garwood, Nora Roberts, Carla Neggar, and other women romance and mystery writers. I save the good books for an airplane when I can really concentrate.

Margie Miller: *God Whispers: Stories of the Soul, Lessons of the Heart*, by Karyn d. Kedar

Cheryl Patt: *From Loksben to LoMein*, by Dr. Donald Siegel, discusses the affinity of Jews for Chinese food, history, stories and recipes; both fun and informative, while opening creative opportunities, perfection

Myra Promisel: The first book that popped into my head was *A Woman Of Independent Means*, by Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey (1978). Although it is fiction, it is written as a collection of letters written by a woman between 1899 and 1968, terrific format and covers so many world changes, especially for women. As for Jewish authors, *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* by Letty Cottin Pogrebin (1991) has

stayed with me because of the chapter when her mother dies and she is not permitted to say *kaddish*.

Robin Rogel-Goldstein: An oldie that I have read many times over the last 30 years is *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. Originally published in 1899, I love it because its theme, female independence, is timeless. Also, *The Red Tent* stands out because it gives voice to our matriarchs in a way I had never heard before.

Randy Schwartz: My favorite is *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. In grade nine English we read this book together, each student taking turns reading aloud to the class, with discussion following each chapter. It was my introduction to great literature. Thanks to my grade nine teacher, Mrs. Smith.

Joyce Weingarten: My two most recent and favorites are: *The Invisible Bridge* by Julie Orringer (a beautifully written book about the Holocaust, family and love) and *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese (a compelling story about family, doctors, Africa and America) I loved this book.

Recommended Reading: Fiction

Appelfeld, Aharon. *Blooms of Darkness*. Shocken Books, 2010 (Story of a young boy whose mother finds him a place to hide during the Holocaust with an old school friend who has become a prostitute)

Aciman, Andre. *Eight White Nights*. Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2010. (Story of the first stages of a love-at-first-sight relationship that begins at a New York Christmas party and continues against a backdrop of urban culture)

Braff, Joshua. *Peep Show*. Algonquin Books, 2010 (A family drama set in a clash of cultures in the mid-1970s. David Arbus, 16 years old, is caught between his mother, whose Hasidic faith is becoming more and more central to

her life, and his father, who runs a Times Square porn theatre) www.joshuabraff.com

Davis, Kyra. *Lust, Loathing and a Little Lip Gloss*. Mira, 2009. (Fourth chick-lit feature about San Francisco author and amateur sleuth Sophie Katz) www.kyradavis.com

Furst, Alan. *Spies of the Balkans*. Random House, 2010. (WWII thriller set in Greece in 1940) <http://alanfurst.net/index.htm>

Goodman, Allegra. *Cookbook Collector: A Novel*. The Dial Press, 2010. (Novel about two very different sisters – Silicon Valley vs. antiquarian book collecting – and the evolution of contemporary values in their contrasting lives) www.allegragoodman.com

Goldstein, Rebecca. *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: a Work of Fiction*. Pantheon, 2010. (Story of a professor whose novel becomes an international sensation for his list of arguments for the existence of God) www.rebeccagoldstein.com

Isaacs, Susan. *As Husbands Go*. Scribner, 2010. (Mystery about a suburban Long Island wife who is left alone with her three boys when plastic surgeon husband is found dead in a hooker's Upper East Side apartment) www.susanisaacs.com

Jacobson, Howard. *The Finkler Question*. Bloomsbury USA, 2010. (Story of two men who reunite with their elderly professor and how the loss of wives and their views of Judaism effect their lives)

Kaplan, Mitchell James. *By Fire, By Water*. Other Press, 2010. (Historical fiction that centers on Luis de Santángel, chancellor to the king of Aragon and a converso, that highlights the ethnic and religious hatred of 15th-century Spain) www.mitchelljameskaplan.com

Krauss, Nicole. *Great House*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010 (Four stories all anchored to a massive writing desk that resurfaces among numerous households from America to Chile to Israel) www.nicolekrauss.com

Lehrer, Alice Becker. *If We Could Hear Them Now: Encounters with Legendary Jewish Heroines*. Urim Publications, 2009. (Commentary on Jewish heroines from biblical to modern times in an interview format)

Orringer, Julie. *The Invisible Bridge*. Knopf, 2010. (Epic tale of three brothers set against the backdrop of Budapest and Paris during the Holocaust) www.julieorringer.com

Ragen, Naomi. *The Tenth Song*. St. Martin's Press, 2010. (Story of a "perfect" Jewish American family whose world is shattered when they are accused of financing a terrorist organization) www.naomiragen.com

Roth, Philip. *Nemesis*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. (Story of the Jewish


neighborhood playground director, Bucky Canter, who grows up in Newark, New Jersey in the 1940s during the polio epidemic) www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/authors/roth

Steinberg, Milton. *The Prophet's Wife*. Behrman House, 2010 (Rabbi Milton Steinberg's unfinished manuscript found after his death is a fictional tale about the prophet Hosea)

Stern, Steve. *The Frozen Rabbi*. Algonquin Books, 2010. (Fantasy about the mystic Rabbi Eliezer who is frozen for many years and awakens in a 1999 power outage)

VanderMeer, Ann and Jeff VanderMeer. *The Kosher Guide to Imaginary Animals: The Evil Monkey Dialogues*. Tachyon Publications, 2010. (Alphabetical listing of fictional creatures and discussions of their kosher edibility)

Weber, Katharine. *True Confections*. Broadway, 2010. (Alice Tatnall Ziplinsky devotes herself to her husband's family-owned-and-operated candy company) www.katharineweber.com



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WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR
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GUIDELINES FOR BOOK DISCUSSIONS

PLANNING THE DISCUSSION

1. Read the book carefully, marking passages that are particularly interesting and important.
2. Determine what aspects of the book will be meaningful to your group:
 - characters and story line●characters' actions●theme●social implications●symbolism
 - author's purpose●literary merit●personal reference●setting
3. Note 3-5 themes which will stimulate discussion. Develop interpretive questions for each theme – be prepared with follow up questions for each theme.
4. Distribute leading questions **in advance** to prepare participants.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

1. Begin the session by giving each member a chance to make a brief comment.
2. Listen carefully to all comments and ask clarifying questions.
3. If relevant discussion ensues, shift your own agenda, and let the group determine its direction.
4. Encourage conversation among the participants rather than with the leader.
5. Make sure the discussion stays focused on the selected book and that each question is answered before a new topic is introduced.
6. Refer to the text to support ideas when necessary.
7. Encourage diverse opinions and welcome participation from all members of the group.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Organizations

Association of Jewish Libraries, P.O. Box 1118 Teaneck, NJ 07666 <http://www.jewishlibraries.org/ajlweb/index.htm>

Jewish Book Council, 520 8th Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10018
<http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/>

Websites

Book Babes, http://thebookbabes.typepad.com/the_book_babes/

Book club girl, <http://www.bookclubgirl.com>

BookBrowse. Book Discussion Groups. <http://www.bookbrowse.com/bookclubs/index.cfm>

Bookreporter. Reading Group Guides. <http://www.readinggroupguides.com/content/index.asp>

Hennepin County Library. Bookspace. <http://www.hclib.org/pub/bookspace/FindAGoodBook.cfm>

Jewish Fiction.net, <http://www.jewishfiction.net/index.php/home/>

Jewish Review of Books, <http://www.jewishreviewofbooks.com/>

New York Times. Book Reviews. <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/books/>

San Francisco Public Library. How to Host a Book Club. <http://sfpl.lib.ca.us/news/ocob/howto.htm>

Tablet Magazine, <http://www.tabletmag.com/>

