



# WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

## Orpah's List 2012 Selection

---

### *One More River* by Mary Glickman

A National Jewish Book Award Finalist

---

#### Summary

Bernard Levy was always a mystery to the community of Guilford, Mississippi. He was even more of a mystery to his son, Mickey Moe, who was just four years old when his father was killed in World War II. Now it is 1962 and Mickey Moe is a grown man who must prove his pedigree to the disapproving parents of his girlfriend, Laura Anne Needleman, to win her hand in marriage. With only a few decades-old leads to go on, Mickey Moe sets out to uncover his father's murky past. The quest takes him deep into the backwoods of Mississippi and Tennessee where he encounters the devastation caused by the great Mississippi flood of 1927 and danger and mayhem at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan at the dawn of the civil rights era. The danger and unexpected revelations provide the greatest challenge of his life as he finally discovers the gripping details of his father's life—one filled with loyalty, tragedy, and heroism in the face of great cruelty from man and nature alike.

---

#### Questions about the story

1. How does Mickey Moe "manage his war"? (p.1)
2. What is Mickey Moe's relationship with the other soldiers? (pp. 10-11) What are the differences he perceives between himself and the Yankee or city boys? How does he feel about being a Southern Jew? What does the term "good old boy" mean for him? Why is he called "Crackah Mick"? How is it used and how does he feel about it?
3. Why does he think about his father so much? How does he envision his father's death in the Ardennes and how does it impact on him? How is this similar to the first time that he meets Laura Anne at her aunt's garden party? Is he aware that he is pairing these two events together?
4. What is the purpose of the social conventions of the afternoon tea? Why do you think they were so important in the South?
5. What are Laura Anne's feelings about lineage? How do they affect Mickey Moe? Why would he think that his father was a bootlegger? What is the importance of family connections in the South? (p. 16)

6. Compare the two physical descriptions of Bernard and Beatrice Diane. Why is she so attracted to Bernard? When and why does her name change to Beadie? How and why does she revere Bernard's memory? How does the culture of Southern Jewry influence Bernard and Beadie's feelings about children, the future, and social convention and manners
7. What noteworthy event occurs at Rachel Marie's party? How does Bernard respond? Why did Cook and Bernard's right-hand man leave right after the party? Who replaced him? What do we learn later in the book about this? Who tells this to Mickey Moe and Laura Anne?
8. From where does Mickey Moe develop his code of manliness? Does he view himself as a good old boy? (p. 29) Why does he think that he could "pass for any Christian boy you could name" and is it a goal? Why does Mickey Moe continually reinvent himself? What does the conflict with Ricky Baker teach him about being Jewish in the South?
9. Bald Horace is the key to unlocking the Levy family history. How does Bernard develop his relationship with Bald Horace? How, as outsiders, do they relate to one another?
10. How does Aurora Mae intersect with two generations of Levys? To what extent does Bernard Levy's love for an African American woman evoke the intersection of their two ethnicities in the South? How does this tension – both in their relations with each other and in the attitudes of the outside world toward them – play out? What is the nature of Aurora Mae's control over him?
11. What are Laura Anne's feelings about her family, its rules and religious observances? Where does Lot get his name? How does this name relate to his physical description and to his religious observance? How does the Needleman family feel about its forebears?
12. Glickman employs a number of biblical references:
  - a. Mickey Moe's grandfather, Harve, promises to work for his bride's parents for seven years in order to be able to marry his bride, Caroline.
  - b. Caroline becomes an abandoned wife, much like an agunah, and she cannot remarry.

Why these references? Why does Beadie berate Laura Anne for leaving home in "the soft measured tones of a woman reciting from a book of Christian poetry"? (p.79) Why would Beadie be so familiar with Christian poetry? Other examples?

13. How does Mickey Moe reflect on the struggle of minorities? Does he see himself as a minority? What minority does Eudora Jean represent when she questions her place in society?
14. Why does the Walter Cohen story play such an important role in the novel? What does the severed foot come to represent for Mickey Moe? Why does he go back for the gun?
15. Why is Bernard's bar mitzvah so important to him? How does his family respond to this rite of passage? Compare the way they look at him with the way Laura Anne is described (p. 13) "like a petulant child of 13." Does he have an advantage as a male that Laura Anne does not have as a female? What insight into the human condition does Bernard's first "career" offer him?
16. What effect does the flood have on Bernard the Handsome and Bernard the Ugly? How would you characterize the dramatic unfolding of events at the levee? What kind of hold did, and could, such an occurrence have through subsequent generations?
17. Why does Aurora Mae say that she has been expecting Mickey Moe? What does she represent to the poor people in the area? How has she reinvented herself? Why does "the rest of the story belong to Beadie"? Why is Laura Anne surprised that Beadie knew the rest of the story? How does Laura Anne feel "110% released" from her parents and her upbringing at this point? How does Glickman use the theme of reinvention throughout her novel?

18. Why was Mickey Moe drafted? How does the Jewish doctor from New York disappoint him? What does this imply about the Jews from the North? How does Laura Anne reassure him when she says that the baby can take things because it has both of their bloodlines? What is she implying about the importance of blood and lineage?
19. What is so interesting about the last line of the novel? In what way does it tie together all of the themes of the novel?

### Questions about the novel's structure

#### One More River to Cross

Spirituals were originally the folksongs of the slaves. Most express their misery while in bondage, yearning for freedom. The words and references are borrowed from the Bible and allude to the Israelite captivity, which the African-American slaves saw as analogous to their own situation. The rhythm of the spirituals retained all the complexity of African music and ultimately became the basis of American jazz.

Just after 1865, most African Americans did not want to remember the songs of slavery and felt great shame when they heard others singing spirituals. Between 1915 and 1925, many African American singers performed these songs at church or on stage, or even in movies. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, demonstrators at civil rights rallies sang them as a way of inspiring people to action. Popular ones included "We Shall Overcome" and "This Little Light of Mine."

Why does Glickman place the words to this famous spiritual at the beginning of the book? What is it about? What does it add to the story?

Below are the texts of two versions of "One More River to Cross." *[Read each one as a choral reading---one person per line---or have one person read the whole text. Do the versions separately.]*

#### Version 1

One more river to cross.  
 One more river to cross.  
 But when the sun says goodbye to the morning,  
 Then they'll be no more river to cross.

One more river to cross.  
 One more river to cross.  
 But when the sun says goodbye to the morning,  
 Then they'll be no more river to cross.

The master's cup is full and running over,  
 While violence seem to be taking over.  
 But not until the sun say goodbye to the  
 morning,  
 Before they'll be no more river to cross - every  
 day!

Another river to cross- every day!  
 Another river to cross.

But when the sun says goodbye to the morning,  
 Then they'll be no more river to cross.

And a one more river to cross.  
 One more river to cross.  
 But when the sun says goodbye to the morning,  
 Then they'll be no more river to cross.

Yes a one more river to cross.  
 One more river to cross.  
 But when the sun says goodbye to the morning,  
 Then they'll be no more river to cross.

The master's cup is full and running over,  
 While violence seem to be taking over.  
 Not until the sun say goodbye to the morning,  
 Before they'll be no more river to cross - every  
 day!

Another river to cross- every day!  
Another river to cross.  
But when the sun says goodbye to the morning,  
Then they'll be no more river..  
No more river, no more river..  
Still every day it's another river, oh,  
To cross.

### Version 2

Oh, you got Jesus, hold him fast  
One more river to cross  
Oh, better love was never told  
One more river to cross  
Tis stronger than an iron hand  
One more river to cross  
Tis sweeter than honey comb  
One more river to cross

Oh, wasn't that a wide river  
River of Jordan, Lord,

Wide river  
There's one more river to cross  
  
Oh, the good old chariot passing by  
One more river to cross  
She jarred the earth an' shook the sky  
One more river to cross  
The good old chariot passing by

One more river to cross  
I pray, good Lord, shall I be one?  
One more river to cross

Oh, wasn't that a wide river  
River of Jordan, Lord,  
Wide river  
There's one more river to cross

Which lines and words did Glickman omit? Why did Glickman choose the version she did?

Does the placement of this spiritual enhance Bernard's story over Mickey Moe's or does it enhance Mickey Moe's over Bernard's or does it do something else entirely? Could it have gone at the end of the novel and had the same impact? Why or why not?

### Doppelgangers

When Bernard the ugly meets Bernard the handsome, the former sees a kind of twin despite the fact that they look nothing alike. They might technically be referred to as *doppelgangers*, the German word for a double or an apparition that represents another side of a character's personality.

*"Together the two Bernards inspected the cotton fields, the rice fields...Bernard the ugly wrote down whatever he was told without knowing why because Bernard the handsome didn't think him important enough to explain things to. He didn't converse with him at all except to command." (p.73)*

Here we see how Bernard the ugly is more of a follower. How do Bernard the handsome's actions change Bernard the ugly?

Sometimes, a doppelganger can personify or suggest or represent a demonic counterpart or twin.

*"Bernard the ugly shot his name-twin twice more, a second time to the chest and once in the head. No one tried to stop him. ..The three stood clinging to one another over the body of Bernard the handsome. Bald Horace kicked him and he didn't move. He's real dead, Bald Horace said. ..Without speaking, they bent and rolled Bernard the handsome into the water, watched him bob and sink and reappear until he was no more." (pp. 182-183)*

For Bernard the ugly, what does the other Bernard personify or represent?

Would Bernard the ugly have had to develop any of the other's cruelty to survive had he never met Bernard the handsome?

Are there any other doppelgangers in this novel?

### **The Quest**

Laura Anne and Mickey Moe continually recount their intention to go on a quest to find out about his father's background. The word "quest" suggests the tradition of knights, especially those of King Arthur's Court who went in search of something unattainable to prove their heroism and their masculinity.

*"She picked up her head and gave him a wondering, tear-stained look. What's that? They are not changing their minds. What can you do? Go on a quest, he said. A quest to find my daddy's people. From everything I've heard all my life about my daddy, he was well mannered, educated, and rich. Surely his people were as noble as any, including that great-great-auntie of yours who arrived in Virginia clutchin' a soup bowl. There's a mystery to it, that's for sure. Whatever made him hide his origins, it must have been some misfortune of his own, not because his people were trash, I'm sure of it."* (p.57)

Often, a quest was performed in the name of a beautiful noblewoman, much like Mickey Moe for Laura Anne. Through the quest, which ennobles and inspires him to great achievements, the knight gains a place in society and glory for defending the woman.

*"Just take me home, Mickey. I need to face the dragons."* (p.56)

The power of the last line of the novel becomes even more significant when one realizes that the knights of King Arthur's Court often did not attain the ladies despite the fact that they had fulfilled their quests.

*"And when they got off the phone, he lay back on his cot under the tarp across from the row of body bags to consider amid the echo of far-off gunfire and the stench of death the wonder that was love."* (p.248)

What does Mickey Moe gain and how does he come to realize its importance over the quest? What part of the quest does he give up to gain Laura Anne's love?

### **The Picaresque Novel**

Many modern American novels can be described as picaresque. In a typical picaresque novel, the main character is a low-born rogue who lives by his or her wits and becomes involved in one predicament after another. Each episode in the journey is a learning experience.

How does this novel transcend this simple definition? What gives it more substance and power?

Does Bernard and Mickey Moe's Jewishness enhance the power of the novel and make it more than a picaresque novel? Why? Why not?

### **The Mississippi Flood of 1927: The worst natural disaster in American history**

In the spring of 1927, after weeks of incessant rains, the Mississippi River went on a rampage. Racing south from Cairo, Illinois, to New Orleans, the river blew away levee after levee, inundating thousands of towns, killing as many as a thousand people, and leaving a million homeless. By the time it reached New Orleans, the flood had not only altered the landscape of an area the size of four New England states, but it had widened the abyss of race relations in the Deep South.

The dramatic and chilling events of *One More River* offer a fictionalized but historically accurate image of the human dimensions of that event. One such eyewitness account is offered in the PBS Series, *Fatal Flood: American Experience*, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/flood/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/flood/)

*“They just herded them up and drove them to the levee. Right down Nelson Street that was the Negro district at the time and they just got them off the streets and just carried them right down to the levee, started them to work”* Maurice Sisson, Greenville

In what ways does Glickman capture the flood’s horrors? How does the following underscore the abject violence wrought not only by the natural -- but more stunningly the human -- horror?

*‘Lay down, woman’ Bernard the handsome shouted. ‘Lay down and marry the goddamn river.’*

### **Biographical information and interviews with Mary Glickman**

From the author of *Home in the Morning* comes this National Jewish Book Award Finalist.

Born Mary Kowalski on the south shore of Boston, Massachusetts, Mary Glickman grew up the fourth of seven children in a traditional Irish-Polish Catholic family. Her father had been a pilot in the Army Air Force and later flew for Delta Air Lines. From an early age, Mary was fascinated by faith. Though she attended Catholic school and wanted to become a nun, her attention eventually turned to the Old Testament and she began what would become a lifelong relationship with Jewish culture. “Joseph Campbell said that religion is the poetry that speaks to a man’s soul,” Mary has said, “and Judaism was my soul’s symphony.”

In her 20s, Mary traveled in Europe and explored her passion for writing, composing short stories and poetry. Returning to the United States, she met her future husband, Stephen, a lawyer, and began to consider writing as a career. She enrolled in the Masters in Creative Writing program at Boston University, under the poet George Starbuck who encouraged her to focus on fiction. While taking an MFA class with the late Ivan Gold, Mary completed her first novel, *Drones*, which received a finalist award from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities but was never published.

Mary also began a career as a freelance writer working with nonprofit organizations. Mary and Stephen married in 1978. Mary converted to Judaism and later worked as treasurer/secretary of her synagogue.

In 1987, Mary and Stephen traveled to the south of Spain for a sabbatical year, soaking in the life of a small fishing village. After seven months abroad and, hoping to extend their time away, they sought a warm--and more affordable--locale. Charleston, South Carolina, with its Spanish moss, antebellum architecture and rich cultural life, beckoned.

Settling on Seabrook Island, Mary fell in love with the people, language, and rural beauty of her new

home. She took a position mucking the horse stalls at the local equestrian center and embraced riding. When the sabbatical ended the couple returned to Boston, but the passion for Southern culture remained with them. They were able to return permanently to Seabrook Island in 2008, where they currently reside.

### **Resources**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41Z9ibhabcg>

<http://www.openroadmedia.com/authors/mary-glickman.aspx>

Follow Glickman on twitter <http://twitter.com/#!/maryglickman>

Follow Glickman on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/MaryGlickmanAuthor>

Interview #1 with Mary Glickman as a National Jewish Book Award Finalist:

<http://issuu.com/jewishbookcouncil/docs/jbw.30.1>

Interview #2 with Mary Glickman

[http://www.writingclasses.com/WritersResources/AuthorAdviceDetail.php/author\\_id/191625](http://www.writingclasses.com/WritersResources/AuthorAdviceDetail.php/author_id/191625)

---

**This guide to *One More River* was prepared by Ellen Kaner Bresnick and Lisa Kogen, August 2012.**

