

MVAH ZOOM BOOK CLUB

October 14, 2021

Next MVAH ZOOM Book Club November 11th at 3PM

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| Attendees: Host: Barbara Brennan Cher Terry Betsy Stephens Louise & Robert McLean | Carol Mattaino Norma Brodsky Sarah Tatum |
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NOTE: I think in the beginning we decided to limit the books discussed to one or maybe two, but no more. It was suggested to expand a bit more on the book, the author – at least a paragraph about it and why you are recommending it. Thank you!

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1. Cher Terry – **Citizens of London by Lynne Olson**. 2010. History and Biography. 496 pages.
The Americans who Stood with Britain in its Darkest, Finest Hour

The acclaimed author of *Troublesome Young Men* reveals the behind-the-scenes story of how the United States forged its wartime alliance with Britain, told from the perspective of three key American players in London: Edward R. Murrow, the handsome, chain-smoking head of CBS News in Europe; Averell Harriman, the hard-driving millionaire who ran FDR's Lend-Lease program in London; and John Gilbert Winant, the shy, idealistic U.S. ambassador to Britain. Each man formed close ties with Winston Churchill—so much so that all became romantically involved with members of the prime minister's family. Drawing from a variety of primary sources, Lynne Olson skillfully depicts the dramatic personal journeys of these men who, determined to save Britain from Hitler, helped convince a cautious Franklin Roosevelt and reluctant American public to back the British at a critical time. Deeply human, brilliantly researched, and beautifully written, *Citizens of London* is a new triumph from an author swiftly becoming one of the finest in her field.

2. Sarah Tatum – **Rena's Promise** by co-author Heather Dune Macadam – **Sisters of Auschwitz**. 1995. Biography/Autobiography. 300 pages.

Among the first 999 Jewish girls on the first transport brought into Auschwitz on March 26, 1942, was twenty-one-year-old Rena Kornreich—the seven hundred and sixteenth woman in that infamous death camp. "This is the first registered transport sent to the camp [They begin numbering them at 1,000]." (Czech, 148). On the other side of the wall, temporarily built to separate the men's and women's camps in Auschwitz I, were Polish Gentiles imprisoned for their political or religious beliefs and Russian POW's. Birkenau, later to become the women's camp, was used to house the Russian soldiers who were executed on an almost nightly basis in Block Eleven (The Block of Death). According to a note one Polish prisoner smuggled to Rena, "12,000 Russian soldiers were here when we came. 5,000 are left.... Your clothes are their uniforms."

Rena had seen enough of war in occupied Poland, where she was from, to know a little of what to expect from her oppressors. Yet, she was still unable to fathom their relentless cruelty.

"How are we going to find our suitcases later?" I figure I'm a human being, I have a right to ask. "Get in line and shut up!" he yells in my face, pointing his gun at me. The hair on my skin bristles. He doesn't see that I am human.

Two days after the first transport, Danka, Rena's younger sister, followed Rena to camp where, together, they spent the next three years of their young lives as slaves to the Third Reich.

The purpose of art, in my opinion, is to take us places where we have never been before. And whether it is in reality or imagination that we journey to Auschwitz the excursion is always valid. Rena's Promise is an artistic attempt to not only provide facts but to transport our readers into the immediate circumstances of survival and further than that, into Rena's mind.

Mama, I brought you the baby back. I repeat it over and over in my head. It is the refrain to the song that keeps me strong and healthy and spirited: Mama, I brought you the baby back. My one great feat in life, my fate, is to survive this thing and return triumphant with my sister to our parents' house. My dream cannot be marred by German whips or chains or rules. I will succeed because I have no other choice. Failure does not even occur to me; we may die in the interim-death cannot be avoided here-but even that will not dissuade me from my sole purpose in life. Nothing else matters but these four things: be with Danka, be invisible, be alert, be numb.

Women's accounts of the Holocaust are rare, but until Rena's Promise there has been no other book written by a survivor from the first transport of women. And for that reason alone, she is historically important. There is very little information about the first transport of women and only vague footnotes mentioning it in the history books. Male survivors' testimonies are far more published, than women's accounts yet the fact remains that the first transport was not men but girls on the verge of womanhood. "...Racism's 'logic' ultimately entails genocide.... Any consistent Nazi plan had to target Jewish women specifically as women, for they were the only ones who would finally be able to ensure the continuity of Jewish life. Indeed, although the statistical data about the Holocaust will never be exact, there is sound evidence that the odds for surviving the Holocaust were worse for Jewish women than for Jewish men" (Rittner and Roth, 2).

3. Betsy Stephens – **The Premonition by Michael Lewis**. 2021. 384 pages. Premonition, is the story of a group of medics and scientists who attempt to get the US government to take pandemic response seriously. In a New York Times interview in January 2021, Lewis described the book, which he was then still working on, as “a superhero story where the superheroes seem to lose the war”.

It's a little grandiose, but it's an accurate enough elevator pitch. Lewis's main subjects are a group of extraordinarily dedicated, resourceful and conscientious people who understand how drastically underprepared America is for a viral pandemic. They know what needs to be done to redress the situation, but are up against the fragmented dysfunction of the federal government and the malicious indifference of the Trump White House.

4. Norma Brodsky— **Maggie- Now by Betty Smith.** 1958. 477 pages
Betty Smith, the beloved author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, weaves a riveting modern myth out of the experiences of her own life in this rediscovered classic. In Brooklyn's unforgiving urban jungle, Maggie Moore is torn between answering her own needs and catering to the desirous men who dominate her life. Confronted by her quarrelsome Irish immigrant father, the feckless lover who may become her husband, and others, Maggie must learn to navigate a cycle of loss, separation, and hope as she forges her own path toward happiness.
5. Louise McClean – **The Other Black Girl by Zakiya Dalila Harris.** 2021. Thriller, Literary fiction, Suspense. 368 pages
Get Out meets *The Stepford Wives* in this electric debut about the tension that unfurls when two young Black women meet against the starkly white backdrop of New York City book publishing. Twenty-six-year-old editorial assistant Nella Rogers is tired of being the only Black employee at Wagner Books.
6. Barbara – **Lady in Waiting: My Extraordinary Life in the Shadow of the Crown. by Anne Glenconner.** 2020. 336 pages.
Discover untold secrets with this extraordinary memoir of drama and tragedy by Anne Glenconner—a close member of the royal circle and lady-in-waiting to Princess Margaret.