



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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In this issue:

- New Release: *The Girl from the Mountain*
- Birthday Short Story Contest
- Author Spotlight: Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger
- Books from the 1920s

From the Editor

Happy Friday everyone!

There's lots of exciting things happening. This week we're chatting with Chrystyna-Lucyk-Berger about her newest release, *The Girl from the Mountain*. Chrystyna has been writing away like a crazy woman. Not only did her newest book release this week (and it's a great one!), but her next manuscript was also due to her publisher this week.

Did that stop Chrystyna from stopping by to join us at Pages of the Past? No, it did not. She stopped what she was doing to take time to talk to us and answer some of my noisy questions. Thank you, Chrystyna. I appreciate that.

Also – Pages of the Past has a birthday coming up the first week in April. We'll be two years old! To celebrate, we're having another short story contest. The winner gets a \$50 gift card! Details follow. Stories aren't due until March 19th, so this gives you some time to put your thinking cap on and come up with a short story. The three pictures prompts follow – all, of course, revolving around birthday parties.

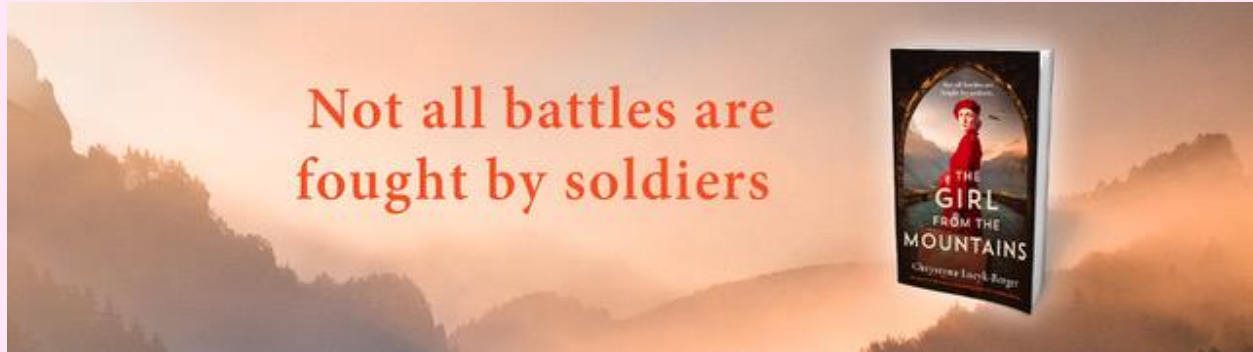
Stay tuned for future issues – In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Sherry Burton, EJ Barnes, Marina Osipova, Renata Stankova, Tom Palmer, Malve von Hassell, Peter Turnham, Carmen Radtke, Florence Kraut, and more!

Trisha

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New Release



The Girl From the Mountain

Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger

The story of one young woman's exceptional courage in the darkest of times, set in the stunningly atmospheric mountains of Czechoslovakia during the Second World War.

1938: Magda has led a sheltered life in her small village until the day she is forced from her home by the invading Nazi army. Torn away from her family and the only place she has ever known, she is offered refuge in an alpine villa owned by brilliant Dr Tauber and his talented, beautiful wife.

But despite having friends in high places, the Jewish Taubers are living on borrowed time. When the Gestapo come to arrest them, Magda is asked to protect something more precious than the silver and jewels they leave behind. Their newborn son Samuel.

Magda turns to the local Resistance, who hide Samuel nearby. Determined to help them and save her country, Magda remains in the house to serve the Nazi commander, passing messages and supplies to the secret network. But when she is caught, Magda is forced to flee into the high mountains with a price on her head.

With the Nazis in pursuit, and nothing left to lose, Magda takes up arms with a band of partisan fighters in the hope of rescuing the Taubers and reuniting them with Samuel. Even if it might mean laying down her life to win the freedom of those she loves...

Birthday Short Story Contest

Flash Fiction Contest Time!

Happy Birthday to Pages of the Past!

It's Flash Fiction Contest Time to celebrate Pages of the Past turning two years old! Enter your flash fiction story for a chance to win a \$50 gift card.

Write a 400–600-word story to one of the three pictures below. Email your entry to texastrishafaye@yahoo.com with 'CONTEST ENTRY – (title of your story)' in the subject line.

Entries are due by midnight, Friday, March 19th.

The stories will be printed in the April 2nd newsletter (our 2nd birthday!). A PDF will be compiled with all the stories and posted on Facebook, allowing others a chance to read the stories and send in their votes. The contest will run until April 12th at midnight. The winner will be announced in the April 16th newsletter.

The winner receives a \$50 gift card.

Use one of the three photographs below as a prompt for your story.





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Author Spotlight: Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger



Hello Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger! It's so nice to welcome you back as a returning featured author. We're here to talk to you today about your newest book, *The Girl from the Mountains*, that just released two days ago. What's exciting for me is how your friends have watched the progression of Magda's journey from a shorter work – *Magda's Mark* – as it's grown into its own full book. Can you tell us a little about how this evolved from its earlier work to the book that just released?

Absolutely. In the back of my mind, I had the idea that I should try for a short story of some kind that I could submit to competitions. The whole idea was to try and earn some more accolades that I could then add to my submission letters to publishers. Shortly before Christmas in 2019, I had my writing group at my place and none of us really felt like working. We were just chatting away over wine and at some point, one of my friends told us an anecdote about her husband. He was born in the Sudetenland during the occupation and WW2. His father was a Nazi commander, his mother was not terribly liked. She felt pretty entitled over the Slavs living in their town. When their son was born in 1942, while Jews were being departed to concentration camps, he was returned to his parents circumcised.

My jaw dropped. My first question was, "Can I please, please, please have this story?"

She did not know the details as to why or how it occurred, only that it had. My second question was then, who would have gone to such great lengths to exact—what I could only interpret as—such revenge?

A name popped into my head. "Magda." I just knew her name had to be Magda. But when I started writing the very first scene, I stopped at about five sentences and thought, "No, this has to be a real journey of her character. Something has to really, really, really push her to this edge and it has to be beyond what she would normally do." It's something that has fascinated me about conflicts and war anyway: how people change, and how some decide to "go to the dark side."

I got on Google and just did a name search for images. I always do this. Up popped a photo of a beautiful young woman with a large birthmark on her face. It took me two seconds and suddenly I knew everything I needed to know about her story. I did very, very little research about the location, choosing Litomeriçe as the place. I just did not want to do Prague. But when it was time for me to find a place for her to hide, that was when I discovered that Theresienstadt Concentration Camp was *right* across the river. And then, suddenly, I had everything I needed. I knew that she would work for a Jewish family, that she loves them, and I knew that that Jewish family would be the reason that she would later commit the act that she does on the Nazi family.

I got to work. That first “short” story came pouring out of me and it ended up being 12K words long. Way, way too long to submit to any competition. What I had was a potential novel. I had amazing characters and I really wanted to give them wings, to expand the story.

I kept *that* at the back of my mind as I was working on the fourth book of my Reschen Valley series. Then came the call for authors for a collection of *novellas* for the 75th anniversary of VE day. I immediately signed up to submit *Magda’s Mark*, and supposedly had a 40K-word limit. Thing is, we were all a bunch of novelists and the majority of us did not keep to that word count. I had special challenges in expanding that story too, because I had to get it to the end of the war. My short story took place in 1938 and 1941. So, suddenly I had four more years of Magda’s story to write. When I was done with *that* version, I had so many wonderful elements that I felt it needed another round of meat on it. But I’d submitted that already to Bookouture – Hachette UK, and they immediately contacted me and said they wanted that book. One of the first things we seriously discussed was that circumcision scene. It has now been changed. As a climax to the short story it worked really, really well, but as an inciting event, it was way too soon for Magda to hit that level of courage and fury. She finds justice in a wholly different way now. The novel is now some 90K words and I feel it is done now. I can also say it is my favorite book to have written.

I remember reading about a research trip that you made to the Czech Republic and the serendipity about finding the town to set Magda’s story in. You’d written about how you found the town on Google Maps, yet when you got there to research, you discovered all sorts of fascinating information that tied into the story. Can you tell our readers more about that experience?

At the point where I was writing the story for the collection, and had to take Magda to joining the resistance, I knew I needed to do a lot more research. I’m not familiar with the Sudetenland but I live in Austria, in the middle of Europe. Prague is only hours away.

I called my dearest friend, who also happens to be my graphic designer and cover designer, and asked her if she wanted to go on a road & research trip. She loves this, and she’s a photographer, so I knew I’d get images I could use to help promote the story.

I kind of pride myself on visiting the settings of my books. It brings so much to life for me. I like to walk the entire area, I drive out to the countryside, visit the forests, the mountains, the fields – everything that shows up in the book, related to location and the landscape is inspired by that trip. I get down on the ground, I freeze, I put myself into difficult situations so that I can *feel* what my characters might be feeling. It’s almost what an actor will do before they take on a role to give it authenticity. I feel, as an author, it’s exactly what I must do with my stories.

I also met with two historians from Theresienstadt. Even though nothing takes place in the camp itself in my novel, it was important to understand what might filter out to the residents of the town. I came with very specific questions, because I already knew what I wanted to happen, and basically was asking for confirmation about plausibility. They then provided me with so many details, including which regiments were there in the last days, and that Litomeriçe was actually the Nazi’s last resort to get into American-occupied hands instead of Soviets’. That provided me for the inspiration of those last chapters, which I really needed to bring Magda’s story full circle. I’ve stopped believing in serendipity. Stuff like this is just proof that I am doing what I am meant to be doing.

The city archives, meanwhile, got a call from me and I told them exactly what I was looking for. These people were incredible. The day I arrived to look at documents and photos, they had an entire *room* filled with materials for me to look over. I work from images a lot. I use those impressions to guess at characteristics, at the way of life, not just historically but also related to traditions, cultures, rituals, and the way things “feel”, right down to how a kitchen is planned, what cups are used, etc. The town is relatively small. By the end of the week, word was getting around our AirBnB there was an author from America who was going to write a novel set there. They gave us an incredible welcome. I hope I did the town justice.

As an author, what are your thoughts and feelings about the experience of taking one particular work and expanding it so much?

Wow, this is a loaded question. I’d like to say I’ll never do it again, but I’ve learned that I’m kind of a masochist. I have never written any book in the same way. They’ve all been so different, even with my series. But taking a short story and writing a book posed a particular problem. The short story went back and forth between 1939 and 1941, and where one scene ended, I’d have a similar scene from the other year start in nearly the same way the last one ended. You can’t do that in a novel. So, my first problem was getting the front end of the book to work without losing that “magic” I felt I had built into the short story. But then the back end started to feel so different it was like working on two books. I did my best for the collection’s version (it came out for a limited time in May), but I had a LOT of work to do when we made the substantial edits with my editor at Bookouture. I still feel that the back end feels more compact than the front, but I am actually quite happy with how it turned out.

This week as *The Girl from the Mountain* is birthed into the world, you’ve also completed many rounds of writing and editing on your Book #9 that is going to your publisher. Are you at liberty to share the title or the story line with readers yet?

It’s been quite a year and not just for me. I’ve been essentially working on three books at once and all at various stages. Bookouture signed me up for two books, and I only had a one-sentence pitch for the second one. “My great-aunt was a spy during the Ukrainian purges...” My editor just said, “Yes. That one.” As you can guess, that was not much to go on. I started with the concept back in early August and have just handed in about 130K words for structural editing.

It takes place in western Ukraine and is very loosely based on my great aunt. My characters are fictional but based on a whole stew of true stories from my relatives’ experiences and historical events. In the novel, Antonia Kozak and Ivan Kovalenko grew up together in the same village and joined the secret Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists to help free Ukraine of its foreign regimes. She is a German Lit professor and a spy, and vets out potential new cadettes from the university. He is all military, a descendant of Cossacks, and together their aim is to help wrest control of the country. She’s “brains”; he’s “brawn”. Then the Germans invade, and all hell breaks loose. Ivan and Antonia are caught up in various political fronts and are violently separated. Ukraine was one red-hot mess when WW2 broke out. Now their only goal is to survive and find one another again.

It has a lot of work yet, and sometimes I’ve thought I’ve bitten off way more than I can chew. But it’s not the first time in my life. And because I have that experience—of really being under pressure—I keep pushing. I just keep telling myself that this is not the best book ever that I have to write, it just has to be the best book that I can write right now. It will be published this summer.

Congratulations Chrystyna on your newest release – *The Girl from the Mountain*. It's been exciting to see Magda's story grow and evolve into this final product. Thank you for returning to Pages of the Past. As we close, can you share a short excerpt of her story with us and a few links to where our readers can go look for *The Girl from the Mountain*?



Magda took a deep breath and went to the bassinet where Frau Koenig's newborn slept. With the plans in place, it was time to take the boy to his mother.

As she had expected, Frau Koenig was not pleased to see her. Magda handed the woman the child and left her to nurse him. Back in the kitchen, she warmed up soup and, as she waited, paced back and forth to the service window. There was still no news whether the resistance had reached the Jews they were trying to protect before Commander Koenig and his Nazi hounds had. She prayed that Renata and Aleš had reached Samuel in time. She prayed that they had reached Davide's wife and child in time. Of course, Magda was the last person they were thinking of reaching, of informing whether they had been successful.

If they had been successful...

The soup began boiling over, and Magda quickly removed the pot from the stove and poured it into a bowl, cut some bread, and arranged a pickled beet salad on a plate. Beets for iron, for a woman who'd supposedly lost too much blood in childbirth. She dropped the pill into the soup and mixed it until it dissolved. The only person Frau Koenig trusted was Jana—a "pure-blood" Aryan—and to be safe, paní Eva had instructed Magda to dissolve the pill in anything but water. Frau Koenig would otherwise pick up on the bitter taste.

She carried the tray upstairs, her own stomach grumbling and she realized she had not eaten dinner the night before, and no breakfast. The baby's cries resounded in the hallway and down the stairwell. When Magda managed to get into the bedroom with the food, she found Frau Koenig in bed looking fully distraught.

"He won't take the bottle," the woman said. "What's wrong with him? Where is the midwife?"

Magda set the tray down. The child was screaming, his face red. "I watched her feed him. You can give him to me."

"I don't need you to feed my son," Frau Koenig snapped.

Magda backed away. She brought the tray to the nightstand and placed it within the mother's reach. The newborn twisted his head and screamed each time Frau Koenig tried to give him the formula, her own face flushed pink.

"What's wrong with him?" she cried.

"It might be colic," Magda suggested. "The midwife—"

“Where is that woman?”

“You sent her away,” Magda said.

Frau Koenig looked at her in disbelief. “I did?”

Magda nodded. *Confuse her. Make her doubt herself.* “Yes, Frau Koenig. You told her that you did not want a Slav to help you. You sent her away.”

“I did no such thing.” But she sounded resigned. “I was tired. I was, I don’t know, half asleep.”

The child filled his lungs and released another plaintive wail, hiccupping on his own frustration.

“Go fetch Jana.”

“Let me try, Frau Koenig. Jana’s sister is very ill. She left early to—”

The child interrupted her at the same time as Frau Koenig shouted, “For heaven’s sake!”

Whatever the woman intended to do next, Magda was faster. She swooped in and whisked the baby out of her arms, and held him close. As if spent, the child began to quiet down.

She looked pointedly at Frau Koenig. “Eat your lunch and I will give him the bottle.”

You can find *The Girl from the Mountain* here:

[Books2read.com/MagdaMountain](https://books2read.com/MagdaMountain)

Amazon: <https://bit.ly/37cgwWe>

Apple: <https://apple.co/3fA6oua>

Kobo: <https://bit.ly/3q34hnx>

Google: <https://bit.ly/39golrh>

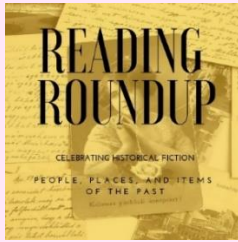
You can find Chrystyna here:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/inktreks

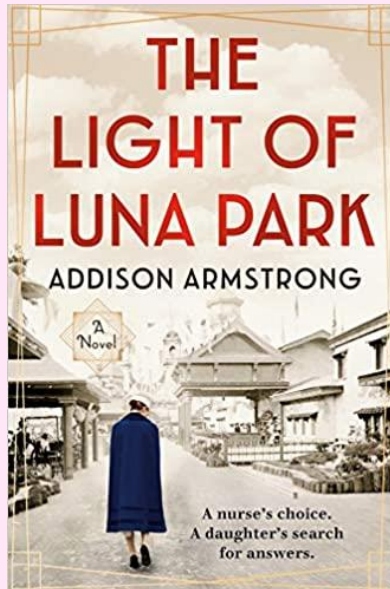
Bookbub: <https://www.bookbub.com/profile/chrystyna-lucyk-berger>

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/ckalyna>

BIO: Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger is an American author living in a mountain hut in western Austria with her amazing husband, a cantankerous old tomcat, a loyal and loving mutt, and two rented ducks. She moonlights as a communications training consultant, amateur gourmet cook, armchair activist, and storyteller/entertainer. As a child, she wanted to grow up to be Grizzly Adams. She’s still working on the beard and the bear.



The 1920s



The Light of Luna Park

Addison Armstrong

New York City, 1926. Nurse Althea Anderson's heart is near breaking when she witnesses another premature baby die at Bellevue Hospital. So when she reads an article detailing the amazing survival rates of babies treated in incubators in an exhibit at Luna Park, Coney Island, it feels like the miracle she has been searching for. But the doctors at Bellevue dismiss Althea and this unconventional medicine, forcing her to make a choice between a baby's life and the doctors' wishes that will change everything.

Twenty-five years later, Stella Wright is falling apart. Her mother has just passed, she quit a job she loves, and her marriage is struggling. Then she discovers a letter that brings into question everything she knew about her mother, and everything she knows about herself.

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