



Vol. 3, No. 13, March 26, 2021

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## From the Editor

Happy Spring everyone!

I have to say, I am totally entranced with this delightful spring weather we're having here in Texas. Warmer days, sunshine, birds serenading me with their magnificent symphonies – and no freezes, snow, busted pipes, or gray gloomy winter days. I hope it is warming up for everyone else too.

Although, my Air Force son in Alaska is still seeing single digits at night, and 20s and 30s during the day, with more snow forecast next week. So, I know that not all are running around in t-shirts and no jackets yet.

This week I'm not including an article about historical fiction like I usually do. We have a lot of new releases coming up – two this week and more for the next three weeks! New historical fiction books to read are always a plus! So I decided to feature two new releases this week – and lead right into our interview with author Peter Turnham.

Keep reading to see what Peter shares with us this week. I think you'll really enjoy reading his charming responses. This man is truly a storyteller. I'm so glad he turned to writing, even if it was in the most extraordinary way. But I'm not going to be a spoiler and tell you why. You'll just have to read on and find out about his writing journey.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Carmen Radtke, Florence Kraut, Alexa Kang, Rachel Zolotov, JJ Toner, Clare Flynn, Ellie Midwood, and lots more!

*Trisha*

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## New Releases!



### When's Mummy Coming

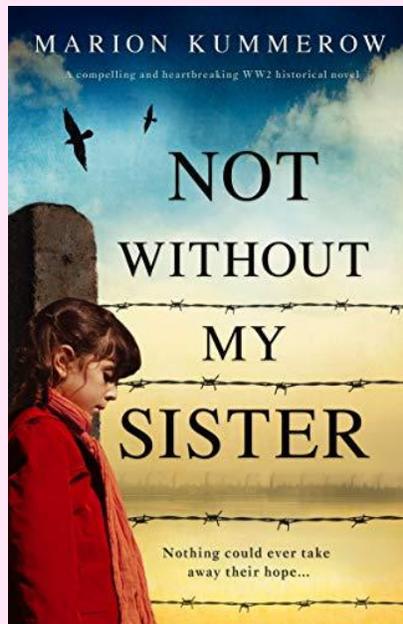
**Rachel Wesson**

#### **To Keep Her Children, Another Woman Has To Die**

**Germany 1939**– To save her baby, Trudi Beck must hand her over to strangers who will take her across the sea to a foreign country. Trudi has already lost her husband to the Nazis, her stepsons are taking the train too. Walking away from the train station with empty arms is the hardest thing she's ever done.

**London 1939** – Newly married, Sally Fletcher, is alone again. Her husband is away training for war, leaving her days and home empty. She volunteers to help with the children from the Kindertransport, becoming captivated by five-year-old Tom and his baby sister, Liesel. Their elder brother, Heinz, is a different story. His attitude, after a period in Dachau concentration camp, makes him difficult to love.

**1945** - Five years of war, with Heinz pulled from her family and sent to an internment camp, Sally has to explain to Tom and Liesel what the end of the war means. Return to Germany for the children, hopefully to a surviving family member. Perhaps Trudi has survived the war. Tortured Sally doesn't wish Trudi harm, but Sally can't let go of her children no matter what others say.



## Not Without My Sister

**Marion Kummerow**

**1944, Germany. Two sisters seek to overcome impossible odds to be reunited, in this utterly devastating and unforgettable novel about sisterhood, courage and survival.**

**All they had left was each other. Until the Nazis tore them apart.**

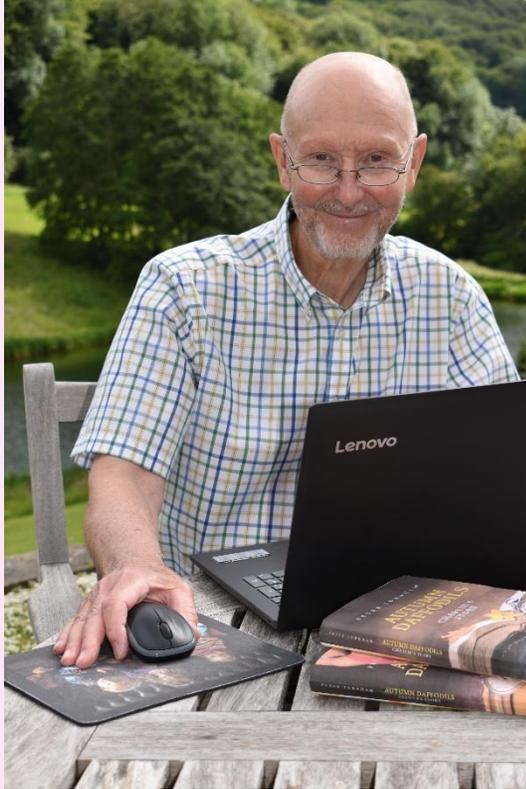
After years of hiding from the Nazis, Rachel Epstein and her little sister Mindel are captured by the Gestapo and sent to the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. The only ray of light for either girl is that they are together.

But on arrival they are separated. As she's seventeen and deemed an adult, Rachel is sent to work in a brutal factory whilst four-year-old Mindel is sent into the so-called "star" camp for Jewish prisoners. All on her own, Rachel knows her sister will have no chance of survival—unless she can find someone to take care of her.

Working in the windowless, airless factory—filling munitions casings with chemicals that burn her fingers and make her eyes sting—the only thing that keeps Rachel going is the thought of her little sister. Because if there's even a chance Mindel is alive, Rachel knows she must try to save her.

But, separated by barbed wire, and treated brutally by SS guards who do not even see them as human beings, can either of the orphaned sisters ever dare to hope that they'll find their way back to each other? And to freedom?

## Author Spotlight: Peter Turnham



**Welcome to Pages of the Past, Peter! We're excited to chat with you this week and find out more about your writing. I have to say that I've been enjoying *None Stood Taller* immensely. I'm captivated with Lily and would love to meet her in person. To start off with, can you tell us why you refer to your writing career as accidental?**

Hi Trisha. Thank you for the opportunity to talk a little about my writing 'career.' I put the word career in inverted commas because for me it is still an unlikely story. It's probably worth telling because there will be many potential writers out there who like me assume they will be unable to do it. My message to those people is to forget your doubts and fears, because if I can do it, there is every chance you can.

I started out with a distinct disadvantage. I am dyslexic, which means I have immense difficulty recognising the correct spelling of a word. It also means that my reading pace is glacial, and my attention span is short. The good news is that dyslexia places me among some rarefied company. Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Richard

Branson, and Steve Jobs, to name just a few. The only writing I had done in the past was dry technical stuff associated with a previous career. That was all about to change.

While fishing in Cuba in 2017, I made the foolhardy mistake of thinking I could play tennis, something I hadn't done for thirty years or more. The only good thing about a snapped Achilles tendon is that as a wheelchair patient, you get priority at the airport! Sitting at home in the UK with my foot up, unable to do anything, was a recipe for insanity. So, in sheer desperation I said to my long-suffering wife, "I'm going to write a novel." Had I said I was going to climb Mount Everest it would have been just as implausible.

The words 'chapter one' came easily, beyond that I had no idea. Eventually I used a character based upon a larger-than-life friend of mine. The story then developed spontaneously, because I could visualise exactly what my character would do or say. I realised if I was to progress, I would need to empathise similarly with entirely fictitious characters. My road to Damascus moment came one morning when I found one of my fictitious characters sitting next to me, writing his own story. As silly as it might sound, it was a revelatory moment.

That was when I started to take it seriously. With lots of help and advice from my wife Carol and a professional editor, I realised I was on to something. According to the editor, everything about my writing was wrong, except for one thing, I had this unexpected connection with my characters. As a dyslexic kid, I missed out on all the writing skills at school. Strangely, what had been a nightmare scenario for me, has now become a passion. To cut that long story short, I rewrote my first novel "Autumn Daffodils, Charlie's

Story” and we published it. The second book “Joanna’s Story” is a continuation of the first novel. And so, from an unlikely beginning, an author emerged.

**Why did you then turn towards historical fiction?**

My first two books met with modest success, and just enough acclaim to encourage me to continue. At that point I took a step back, and the businessman in me took a long hard look at this new ‘career’ of mine. The first two books were hard to market because they do not fit into a specific genre. They fall into the broad spectrum of contemporary fiction; I could see that a more focused genre would be much easier to market. So, I looked down the pages of Amazon and for no particular reason latched onto World War Two.

I bought a few of the best-selling novels, looked through them, and before I knew it I was hooked. In retrospect, perhaps the whole thing was serendipitous, because my parents lived through the war, we lived in London. As a youngster I would listen to their conversations, I was very much aware of what they had lived through. Cataclysmic events like the Blitz seem to not only create an indelible memory in the minds of those involved, it seems to form a collective national memory. It’s almost as if there is an epigenetic inheritance involved, because I feel a connection to the period.

**So in your new book, how do you go about creating a character like Lily?**

I honestly don’t know how other authors go about this process, but for me characters have to spontaneously appear. I set the opening scene in the new book during the Blitz, and the principal character is a young woman called Lily. That was the almost blank canvas I started with, and I just let my characters generate their own personalities. First and foremost, I write for my own pleasure, and in that regard the reader and I share the same voyage of discovery. For that to work Lily cannot exist as a notional personality, she has to inhabit my mind as a real person. It took about a week of sketching the outline of the character, and then miraculously she stepped off the page and started writing her own story. In your introduction, Trisha, you actually summed up perfectly what I try to achieve. You said, “I felt her as a real person.” Comments like that really make my day, because for me she is a real person. When I’m writing, if Lily is happy, I’m happy. If she is in tears, I am in tears, we share the same emotion. It’s a big ask, but that is what I hope for the reader.

**I notice you write in first person perspective, why do you choose to do that?**

Not so long ago, I would have said because I don’t know any better, but it’s a conscious decision now. I’ve experimented with different writing techniques, to convey that feeling of oneness between reader and narrator. The logic of third person perspective is that an omniscient third person can be in all places at once in order to convey the full breadth of the story. The limitation is that by definition the reader is once-removed from the characters. Conversely, the limitation of first person is that my story can only ever be told through the eyes of the narrator. The advantage for me is that my principal character is talking directly through the reader. Importantly it also gives me direct access to my narrator’s inner thoughts, which I think can sound contrived in third person. If you want to get inside a character, you need to get as close as possible.

**What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?**

You're right Trisha, there are challenges. One of the first things I noticed when looking at some of the best-selling novels set during World War Two, was that a lot of them only pay lip service to the historic detail. I had two thoughts about that; on the one hand I felt they lacked authenticity. On the other hand, they were the best-selling novels! Book reviews can also reflect that juxtaposition, it all depends upon which aspect of the book the reader prioritises. I am very much a gatherer of facts; the details need to be accurate; the history must be correct. Therein lies the problem for an author like me. My goal is unashamedly to make the reader experience every emotion that my character feels. I also want to detail the facts and history behind the story. Marrying history seamlessly with emotion is a little like mixing oil and water.

There is another difficulty when you try to weave historic figures into your fiction. For example, I created a scene where the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, gives a speech to the SOE section which Lily has helped to create. Writing a speech for Winston Churchill was not for the fainthearted. I felt a crushing responsibility to make it sound authentic; I worked on it for days. Come the end, I was absolutely drained. In the following scene, Churchill asks Lily if she has lost anyone during the war. I was fine until Lily came to answer that question. All I can say is that if the reader can empathise with my characters as I do, then they are in for a challenging time!

**Tell me more about what lies behind your character Lily.**

For it to work my narrator has to be a really absorbing character, someone with whom the reader can completely empathise. In "None Stood Taller", Lily Heywood is a young woman living in Stepney in the East End of London. She is an exceptionally gifted woman, but her expectations are restrained by her social class and poor background. To add depth to the character, she has a troubled upbringing with her parents, which involves her spending a lot of time with her grandmother in the Kent countryside. There is also an enigmatic family friend who is hugely influential in Lily's life.

When Lily is bombed during the Blitz she loses everything; it sets the scene for her to leave London and make her way in the world. She is a Cockney girl from the East End of London, blessed with prodigious talent, but restrained by her own demons and social class. As you already picked up Trisha, Lily grows in stature throughout the book, she epitomizes the triumph of the individual against adversity. As the book blurb says, Lily rises to the very top of the British wartime establishment, but not without taking a few hearts with her.

**Do you have favorite methods you use in researching your books?**

I use everything that comes to hand. We have many books at my disposal, but my first port of call is usually the internet. I will waste half a day trying to dig out an obscure fact that probably no one else will even notice. Silly things such as a day of the month; whatever dates I use, I take from the appropriate 1940s calendar. Phases of the moon will be accurate, Lily's typewriter is the correct model. My wife says I am obsessive, can you believe it? The thing is, these things are now so easy to access on the internet. I work with two screens, researching on one, and one finger typing on the other.

A splendid example of how useful the internet can be has just occurred with the current book. Lily's intelligence people needed to understand how the V2 rocket engine works. I found numerous sites of interest, but best of all, there are YouTube videos where a guy explains how every component of the engine works in minute detail. The thing that is important here is that the boffins in my story need to

sound like genuine rocket scientists for the story to be credible. I spent three days researching that engine just so that Lily's boffins could have four authoritative sentences to say!

### **Do you have anything else in the works?**

Yes, there is a book to follow "None Stood Taller" which is progressing well. The first book goes from 1941 to 1944, it ends on D-Day. It also leaves the reader with more questions than answers concerning Lily's complicated love life. The second book picks up the story from D-Day and takes us through to VE-Day. Following D-Day, the backdrop is obviously the battle for Normandy, and later the battle for greater Europe. Hitler launches his vengeance weapons, the V1 and later the V2, both of which prove to be extremely significant in Lily's life.

"None Stood Taller" is faithfully accurate with its detail, but I am taking it a step further in this follow-up. I am attempting to lay out the history of the war chronologically from D-Day to VE-Day, while keeping my narrator front and centre. So far (90,000 words) it is going very well. Lily and Edward created Station M, which is essentially an SOE intelligence section, so they are privy to all the intelligence and progress reports coming out of Europe. This gives me the opportunity to relay the details of the European war, as and when Lily is given them. So far, fact and fiction are working well together, so fingers crossed.

As for Lily, this latest book takes her through her most challenging situations yet. She has risen to every one of those challenges, but she has changed now that the demons from her childhood are finally laid to rest. In the first book the enigmatic benefactor tells her that if others walk she can run, and if others run, then she can fly. There is a moment in this new book when she finally believes that to be true. My suspicion is that no longer needing to prove herself to anyone, a different Lily is going to emerge at the end of the book. I genuinely have no idea how this is going to end but end it must. Saying goodbye to Lily is going to be a traumatic experience.

### **Is there anything else you would like to share with us?**

I am very much at home doing research, so I think I have found my niche. I have really enjoyed mixing fact with fiction and trying to make the transition seamless. There are other genres of course which require research, so who knows what the future holds, but certainly for now I am greatly enjoying historical fiction. There are other prominent characters in "None Stood Taller" particularly a delightful character called Dotty. Several people have asked me if there will be another book about her. My initial reaction was that I wanted to move on, but I must admit Dotty is certainly worthy of a book of her own. The current book is enjoying success beyond my wildest dreams, so if the follow-up does as well, perhaps there will be a third book!

In the meantime, thank you Trisha for allowing me to share my newfound passion for writing with you.



**You can find Peter Turnham's books here:**

[NONE STOOD TALLER](#)

[AUTUMN DAFFODILS – CHARLIE'S STORY](#)

[AUTUMN DAFFODILS – JOANNA'S STORY](#)

**You can find Peter Turnham here:**

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BIO: I took the rather rash decision to retire from my dental technology business at the tender age of forty-six in order to build my own house on the top of the Cotswold Hills, to breed a few trout, and to be involved with fly fishing on our lakes. As reckless as that decision might have been, it was well over twenty years ago now, and we're still here. We are not really self-sufficient, but my wife Carol and I manage and maintain everything ourselves. My only regret is that I didn't discover the joy of writing sooner. It has become one of my greatest pleasures in life. My fourth novel is well underway, and there will hopefully be many more.

These days we let out one of our farm buildings as a holiday cottage. That's proven to be quite successful, and we have certainly met some interesting people from the UK and abroad. We also have three adult children between us who, of necessity, have done exactly the same as I did – except in reverse. They have left the "good life" in the Cotswolds and are finding their way in the world; not to mention providing us with four lovely young grandchildren.

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