



Vol. 3, No. 18, April 30, 2021

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## From the Editor



Happy Friday to all of our historical fiction lovers!

There's lots of good book talk going on this week. First, we're looking at a new book by Clare Flynn. She is our featured author coming up in two weeks, so you'll hear more about her newest release then.

This week we're chatting with Rachel Zolotov and finding out all sorts of fascinating information about her family history and how it influenced her book, *The Girl with the Silver Star*. Keep reading to find out more – and about an amazing find of letters written by her great-grandfather to her great-grandmother and the girls. It's so wonderful how all of her research and discovery tied in with her book. I think you'll enjoy reading about it too.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with JJ Toner, Clare Flynn, Ellie Midwood, Alex Schulz, Sharon Bradshaw, and lots more!

*Trisha*

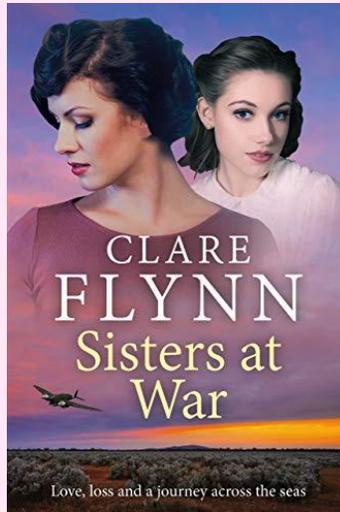
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## New Releases!

# Sisters at War

Clare Flynn



A dramatic and emotional wartime novel

1940 Liverpool. The pressures of war threaten to tear apart two sisters traumatised by their mother's murder by their father.

With her new husband Will, a merchant seaman, deployed on dangerous Atlantic convoy missions, Hannah needs her younger sister Judith more than ever. But when Mussolini declares war on Britain, Judith's Italian sweetheart, Paolo is imprisoned as an enemy alien, and Judith's loyalties are divided.

Each sister wants only to be with the man she loves but, as the war progresses, tensions between them boil over, and they face an impossible decision.

A heart-wrenching page-turner about the everyday bravery of ordinary people during wartime. From heavily blitzed Liverpool to the terrors of the North Atlantic and the scorched plains of Australia, *Sisters at War* will bring tears to your eyes and joy to your heart.

## Author Spotlight: Rachel Zolotov



**Hello Rachel Zolotov! We're excited to chat with you today about your writing. I enjoyed reading about how your book, *The Girl with the Silver Star*, was inspired by Raisa, your great-grandmother's history. For our readers, can you share a little bit about how her real-life tale inspired your book?**

Thank you for having me – I am so excited to share all about my book baby! To be honest, I never imagined that I would write book. My great-grandmother's story just fell into my lap. About four years ago, I asked my mom to tell me a little more about my family's experience during WWII in the Soviet Union. I have been an avid reader of WWII since a young age, but it wasn't until I was an adult with my own kids, that I started wondering about my own family. My mother knew very few details because it simply wasn't talked about much – for a few reasons. Of course, it was a painful memory for them, but also in the Soviet Union it wasn't common for people to talk about it, many things were very "hush hush." Based on the few details she did know, I began exploring. Once I started piecing the story together, I knew it was one that needed to be shared.

**I was reading about your book on your website (<https://rachelzolotov.com/>) and was excited when I saw that you'd found a digitized copy of your great-grandmother's registration card from her fleeing the country during World War 2. But then I scrolled down further and saw that you'd also discovered some of the many letters and postcards that Abraham, your great-grandfather, had sent her and the girls. What was your reaction when you found out that these actual correspondences existed?**

Right after my mom told me that my great-grandmother had fled with her two girls, Luba (my grandmother) and Sofia from Minsk to Uzbekistan during the War, I went straight to Google and started digging. The first thing that was clear to me was how incredibly brave she must have been. The distance from Minsk to Tashkent is about 2,500 miles, roughly the distance from San Diego to the tip of New York! According to my mom, they walked some of the way and took trains. Not too deep into my search, I came

across a website JewishGen.org, where I was able to search by name, and found a copy of Raisa's registration card. This small card began a big search – a search to find more. I also found the registration for Raisa's parents and sisters, confirming that they must have traveled together from Bobruisk where her family lived at the time. This information sent me on a quest for more. This time I started closer to home and began reaching out to family. I even found some relatives I didn't know existed that still live in Minsk. A distant family member of my great-grandfather Abraham sent me a detailed family tree, which was extremely helpful. From Sofia's son, I received perhaps the greatest gift of all, a binder full of postcards and letters that Abraham sent to Raisa during the war. I was overjoyed when I opened the cover; the hair stood up on my arms as I carefully leafed through the letters. I can't even describe how incredible it was to get this amazing piece of history. After a few weeks of reading through them with a dear friend, and translating them to English, I knew that I was in the presence of a story not only about bravery, but love and hope as well.

**Do you have any favorite methods you used in researching *The Girl with the Silver Star*?**

There are so many incredible resources available online that have made digitized documents available to the public. As I mentioned, JewishGen.org was a wealth of information, as well as yadvashem.org and ushmm.org. A great book that really helped me to understand the circumstances and life for the evacuees in Uzbekistan was "To the Tashkent Station" by Rebecca Manley. I also spent a lot of time listening to accounts of survivors who went on similar journeys to Uzbekistan.

**Tell us about one of your favorite scenes from one of your books.**

One of my favorites scenes takes place in the past. Although the novel is primarily set in the war years, some chapters provide a glimpse into their life before the war. These scenes are so important to capture the family bonds and the good times they had. This particular part is all about how Raisa and Abraham meet and their wedding day. It sets the scene for the story behind the "Silver Star," and also is the foundation for the beautiful love story that they shared. This scene immerses the reader in the traditions of the Soviet Jews and leaves them feeling like they were at the celebration with them.

**What challenges did you find in writing this historical tale based on actual family history?**

This is a great question! I knew when I started writing that I wanted to portray as much factual information as I could. I only had bits and pieces from my mom and the letters, so of course I had to fictionalize the storyline, but everything that happened could have happened and was thoroughly researched to be sure it was accurate. The most challenging part was my own constant desire to write a novel that would make my family and ancestors proud. In the beginning, this was always in the back of my mind, but once I realized that no matter what, sharing this important story would honor them, it took that pressure away, and I was able to write from the heart.

**How long did it take to research and write your book?**

I spent nearly a year researching and about two years writing and editing.

**You're a mother of two daughters. How do you juggle the demands of family while writing?**

I am someone you could call a busy body. I get that from my mom. I am always doing something, and I get things done quickly. Writing this book was a brand-new experience for me. I only had "nap times" and late nights to write. Some weeks were easier than others, but I wasn't in a rush, so I wrote when I could

find the time. My husband and girls are incredibly supportive, and I am so lucky to have them. I believe it so important that I shared this experience with my girls. Not only did I write this story for them, but they looked on as I spent years focused on the research, writing, editing and publishing. They saw first-hand that if you work hard, you can achieve something amazing. When my daughter told me that she was proud of me, it made all the late nights and tough days worthwhile!

**Is there a story behind your cover?**

The cover of my book is really special to me. The photo on the front is an original photo of Raisa and Abraham. In fact, it is the only remaining photo of them together. It was taken around the time they married in 1925. I used artificial intelligence software to colorize the photo and was amazed with the results. The cover shares bits and pieces of the story with Stalingrad in the background and the train tracks representing their long journey.

**Is there anything you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?**

I would like to thank everyone for reading this interview and getting to know me and *The Girl with the Silver Star* a little better. If you read *The Girl with the Silver Star*, I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed writing it. I would like to hear your thoughts and comments and would absolutely love if you reached out when you are finished reading!



You can find *The Girl with the Silver Star* here:

<https://rachelzolotov.com>

<https://amzn.to/37IZEqv>

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-girl-with-the-silver-star-rachel-zolotov/1138259902>



You can find Rachel Zolotov here:

<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorRachelZolotov>

<https://www.instagram.com/rachelzolotov/>

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/55164510-the-girl-with-the-silver-star>

BIO: Rachel Zolotov was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri as a first generation American born into a Belarusian family. Rachel has a passion for antique jewelry, art, reading, cooking and history. She started her career as a Gemologist and Jewelry Designer and studied Hand Engraving in Austria.

After the births of her children, Rachel felt the desire to research her own lineage and was inspired to uncover the puzzle pieces of the journey her ancestors had taken during WWII. She wrote *The Girl with the Silver Star* in hopes of teaching and sharing what she discovered with future generations.

In her free time, you can find her snuggling up with a good book and a large cup of tea. Rachel lives in St. Louis, Missouri with her husband and two beautiful daughters.

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