



Vol. 3, No. 21, May 21, 2021

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From the Editor

Happy Friday to all of our historical fiction lovers. One thing that this weekly newsletter has done is to add to my list of esteemed authors. I keep finding more and more authors whose writing I admire. Often, I'll see a phrase or a paragraph and while I beat the green-eyed monster of envy into submission, think 'Oh, I wish I could have woven those words together like that.'

But I find that the more we read, the more we learn, and the better our own writing becomes, even when it's on the tail of admirations for other author's works. This week, we chat with Ellie Midwood, another author who jumped onto my list of 'I want to be them when I grow up!' Keep reading to find out the fascinating background to what led her to write the awesome historical novels that she has.

I threw in a few of my own thoughts about how eating an elephant compares to writing our own family history. Two years ago, I held classes on writing family history at three local libraries. And then Covid hit our world. So now I'm taking the information I'd compiled for the classes and am working on putting it all together into a workbook that I'll submit to a small press publisher. In my spare time. (Heads up – it won't be happening *this* month LOL!)

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Sharon Bradshaw, Jeff Salter, Rebecca Dharlingue, Gail Ward Olmsted, and lots more!

Trisha

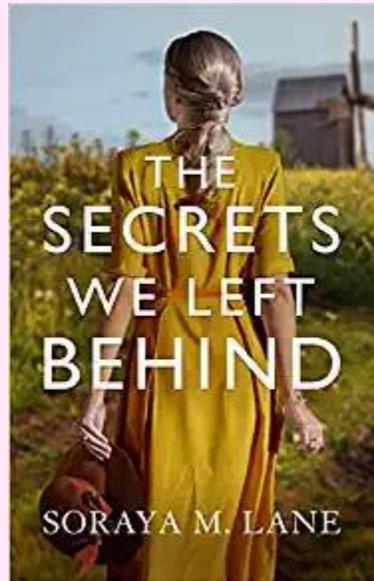
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New Releases!

The Secrets We Left Behind

Soraya M. Lane



Occupied France, 1940. When the staff at a field hospital draw straws to find out who will join the evacuation from Dunkirk, Nurse Cate is left behind. But when the Nazis arrive to claim prisoners of war, she takes her chance and flees into the night, taking one patient with her.

Fifty miles away, the surrendering soldiers of the Royal Norfolk Regiment are shot dead by the advancing Germans. Beneath the pile of bodies two men survive, crawling to the safety of a nearby farmhouse, where sisters Elise and Adelaide risk their lives to take them in. When Cate, too, arrives at their door with her injured soldier, the pressure mounts.

The sisters are risking everything to keep their visitors safe. But with the Nazis coming ever closer and relationships in the farmhouse intensifying, they must all question the sacrifices they are willing to make for the lives of others. How far will they go for family, friendship, and love?

Eating an Elephant

I'm sure you've heard the answer to the question – How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. The same method applies to writing your family history. Often, it's hard to get started on a project that seems so large and overwhelming. So instead, we do nothing.

When I'm feeling that there's too much to do, or I'm not sure what direction I need to head in next, I'll sit down with a few sheets of paper and break the project into smaller bite-size tasks. I end up with a lot of lists, but it gives me a good overview of what I still need to do. On the days I can fit in an hour or two on the project, I scan through these pages that I keep in the front of the file and find something that I can accomplish in the time I have available.

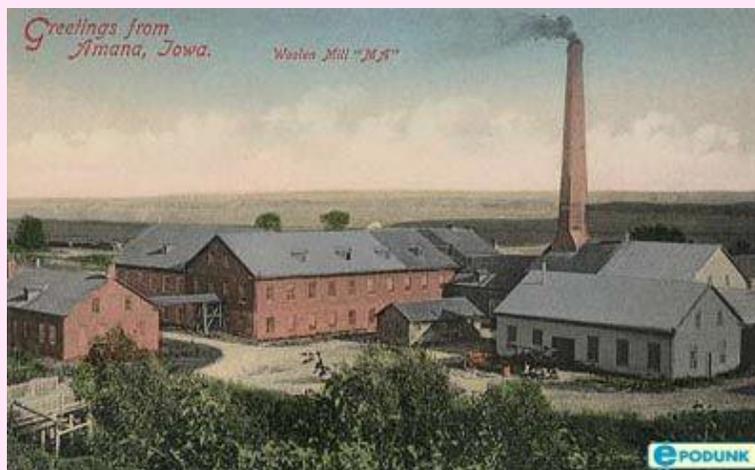
One page may be titled 'Interviews.' I'll list the names of people I want to talk to. Who can I call? Who can I write to? Who can I message on Facebook? Are there specific stories I want to ask about, or certain times in their life, or do I simply want to let them talk as I record or make notes?

Another page may be 'Research.' What books do I want to look for? What subjects can I research online? What places do I want to visit? Are there local historical societies that may provide nuggets of additional information?

'Timeline' may be another. I might start outlining the period I want to write about, and start inserting names, dates, and incidents on the timeline, trying to get a jumble of notes line up into a semblance of organization.

I may have some pages for 'Characters', where I'll begin adding details to each person's page. Having everything handy on one page sure saves a lot of time later. Initially I didn't do this, and I can't count how many hours I spent combing through a notebook and three legal pads full of notes, looking for that one date or name I needed.

When you do this and have a handful of pages of smaller tasks, it's easier to check them off one at a time, with every fifteen minutes or every hour you have available. One bite at a time – and soon your whole elephant is beginning to look like a manageable project after all.



Author Spotlight: Ellie Midwood



Hello Ellie Midwood. We're honored that you've joined us at Pages of the Past this week. I read that your grandfather telling you of his experiences on the frontline in WWII sparked your interest in the history of World War II, which has since led to many excellent books set in this era. Can you tell us how his stories influenced you to your journey in writing historical fiction?

Thank you so much for having me, Trisha! Yes, indeed, my grandfather was perhaps the biggest influence on me and my fascination with everything WWII and Holocaust related. As a child, I much preferred listening to his war stories instead of regular children's fairytales. I guess it's because they were real, and he was a real-life hero in my eyes and not someone made up and mythical. As I grew up, I realized just how much he had sacrificed and how terrifying those experiences must have been for an eighteen-year-old kid (the age that my grandfather volunteered for the front) even though he recounted them later to me with purposeful lightheartedness. I don't know if it was therapeutic to him or he just couldn't say no to a little pest asking him for a countless time to tell her the story about a German fighter plane chasing him all over the potato field and miraculously missing, or about crossing the river in sub-zero temperatures while carrying a rifle over his head, or signing his name on one of the columns of the Reichstag, but the fact remains: what began as a little girl's fascination with his personal experiences eventually transformed into a lifetime passion for war history and I couldn't be more grateful to him for it.

Your first full-length historical novel, *The Girl from Berlin*, ended up being a series with three books: *Standartenfuhrer's Wife*, *Gruppenfuhrer's Mistress*, and *War Criminal's Widow*. How did your early interest in historical fiction bloom into these three books?

You'll probably laugh but I cringe when I think of "The Girl from Berlin" now, haha! It was my very first writing effort and one of those cases where I allowed the characters to take over and run away with the plot. It's basically a mixture of real events and all the war fiction I had absorbed throughout the years. Surprisingly, it was this trilogy that earned me my very first loyal fans, but if I was writing it today, I would have changed a lot. I've matured a lot as a writer since I wrote it and learned to express myself much

better, so the trilogy now looks like a hot mess to me. Many writers have the same sentiments concerning their very first works, so I guess it's common among us, haha!

You have a new book that just released in March of this year, *The Girl Who Escaped from Auschwitz*. I understand that this story featuring Mala Zimetbaum is based on a true-life experience. How did you find out about Mala's tale and how did it evolve into this newest book?

I first came across Mala's name in one of the survivors' memoirs, then I saw it being mentioned in another, then I saw it again in a historical study and eventually I grew curious: what was so special about this young woman that she had left such a profound impression on her fellow inmates? It turned out that she was an extraordinary woman indeed, who had not only helped many Auschwitz inmates survive but showed them that the resistance to the Nazis was possible and that love would always be stronger than hate. It was then that I knew that I just had to tell her story. I don't want to give away any spoilers about the novel here, so I'll just say this: with her example, Mala inspired many of her fellow inmates not only survive against all odds but actively resist their SS oppressors. She was a true hero, just like her beloved, Edek.

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

I don't have any favorites; I just pretty much gulp down every morsel of information available on the particular subject I'm writing about and then create a narrative around it. If there are documentaries available, that's perfect as it helps me actively visualize everything and put it into words; if there are memoirs written about it – it's also great as I'm getting a first-hand account from the people who actually lived through the events I'm writing about, and it doesn't get better than that. I'm a little OCD when it comes to research and I always make sure that I get even the most minutest detail right, starting with the food that was available to my characters at the time, to fashion, to speech, to the descriptions of the battle scenes. I feel it's my duty before my readers to present as accurate picture of the past as possible, so I always try my best to research my stories as thoroughly as it's possible, by any means available.

With all of the books you've written, you have a huge cast of characters under your care. Tell us about one of your favorite characters from one of your books.

I've already told you about Mala, so I guess besides her and Alma Rosé, who was also a true Auschwitz hero, I'd say my other favorite character is Gisela from my upcoming novel "The Girl on the Platform." Just like most of my characters, she's also based on a real person and is one of the strongest women I've ever written. When we just meet her, she's already sick with tuberculosis and yet, she sets on a dangerous enterprise because she believes that the cause she's fighting for (the German Resistance) is bigger than her freedom and life. She's not the central character but one of the most memorable I've ever written (I'm sure readers will agree after they read the story; my editor has already agreed, haha!). Fiery, incredibly resilient, outspoken, selfless, and brave, Gisela is a true inspiration and definitely one of my favorites.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

Depicting characters based on real people as accurately as possible has to be the biggest challenge. I feel, an author has to be extremely careful handling such characters and stay as closely to the truth as possible in order to honor those people's memories in the best way possible. In short, we must write about them in such a way that they would recognize themselves in their portrayal instantly and be proud of the way we told their incredible true stories. I always keep that in mind when I write about them.

What does a typical writing day look like for you?

I usually do most of my research before I begin working on a new project, but I still do bits of research prior to writing every new scene. So, my morning usually starts with a couple of mugs of strong coffee, a couple of research sources I consult before I open my manuscript, and then I pretty much let the words flow. I do take breaks for lunch and to walk my dogs (walking in particular helps me resolve certain plot problems or come up with a metaphor that kept escaping me) and usually finish by four or five o'clock. I also like setting a certain word count for each day as it helps me with the deadlines and ensures that I don't slack off, haha!

It appears that researching WWII and Holocaust history has become a deep passion for you. I saw where you'd mentioned that you have a collection of vintage photographs depicting ordinary soldiers in non-combative situations of their front-line life. I'm a collector of vintage photographs and postcards myself, although I must admit I don't have any wartime photos like you do. What is it about these photographs that drew you to collect them?

I guess I'm so drawn to them because each such photograph tells its own story. In them, we don't see soldiers but young men playing cards, cuddling with a dog or a kitten, writing in a journal, dancing and goofing around. And the most fascinating thing is that each army – British, Soviet, American, German – they all have similar photographs. Under those uniforms, we're all the same; that's what makes wars so nonsensical to me personally. I guess I just love collecting these little slivers of humanity taken in the most inhuman times and hoping that my descriptions of them (I do put certain things I see in the photos into my novels) would teach future generations something.



YOU CAN FIND ELLIE MIDWOOD'S BOOKS HERE:

Ellie's Amazon page: <https://www.amazon.com/Ellie-Midwood/e/B00MAZ2N30/>

"The Girl Who Escaped from Auschwitz" links:

Amazon: <https://geni.us/B08P3HH53VCover>

Apple: <http://ow.ly/mZuu50CBqkh>

Kobo: <http://ow.ly/C5Ft50CBqbv>

Google: <http://ow.ly/oVUo50CBqm7>

“The Violinist of Auschwitz” links:

Amazon: mybook.to/ViolinistOfAuschwitz

Apple: <http://ow.ly/jkTI50B4gxs>

Kobo: <http://ow.ly/CEaa50B4gvv>

Google: <http://ow.ly/Tb1c50B4gBL>

YOU CAN FIND ELLIE MIDWOOD HERE:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EllieMidwood>

Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8424262.Ellie_Midwood

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/elliemidwood/>

Bookbub: <https://www.bookbub.com/profile/ellie-midwood>

BIO: Ellie Midwood is a USA Today bestselling and award-winning historical fiction author. She owes her interest in the history of the Second World War to her grandfather, Junior Sergeant in the 2nd Guards Tank Army of the First Belorussian Front, who began telling her about his experiences on the frontline when she was a young girl. Growing up, her interest in history only deepened and transformed from reading about the war to writing about it. After obtaining her BA in Linguistics, Ellie decided to make writing her full-time career and began working on her first full-length historical novel, "The Girl from Berlin." Ellie is continuously enriching her library with new research material and feeds her passion for WWII and Holocaust history by collecting rare memorabilia and documents.

In her free time, Ellie is a health-obsessed yoga enthusiast, neat freak, adventurer, Nazi Germany history expert, polyglot, philosopher, a proud Jew, and a doggie mama. Ellie lives in New York with her fiancé and their two dogs, Pupper and Pupcake.



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