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From the Editor

Don't you hate when you get attached to a character and start feeling like you know them...and then, the book ends? I went through that last week when I finished *Goodnight from London*, by Jennifer Robson. I followed Ruby Sutton in her journalism career as she moves from the US to London early in World War II. Through the Blitz, bombings, frights of war and more, she created a new life for herself and I was there watching her do it every step of the way. And then the story is over.

An added bonus at the end of the book helps makes up for the ending of the tale. We meet the author, have a comprehensive glossary of terms, book club questions, and a Voices from the Past section, where Robson talks about her research and the people she talked to about these days.

She had an interesting tidbit about how details make a story come alive. She writes:

For example, it isn't enough to say, when describing a dinner during the war that a family ate sausages. Who cares?

If however, the people eating the sausages complain about how they taste and fret over what unsavory ingredients may be hiding in the sausages, and talk about their conversation with the butcher, and if all of that is based on the first-hand recollections of people who actually had such experiences, then the scene in question becomes more than a one-dimensional narrative. Then it becomes, ideally, something far closer to the truth.

Her words give me pause as I reflect on my own writing and try to see where I can learn from her and use more factual details to flesh out my scenes in a more realistic and relatable manner.

I still want to ring Ruby up and see how she's doing though.

Trisha

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Moonshiners

Moonshine has become a romanticized part of our Jones family history. Papa Goss, my great-father, was the moonshiner in the Arkansas Ozarks, in Myrtle, outside of Harrison. Casey Jones, my grandfather, was the 'runner', driving down to pick up a trunk load of moonshine and running it back to Chillicothe, Missouri. During these trips down south, Casey met the moonshiner's daughter, Beatrice Goss. In 1935 they married, and the rest, as they say, is history.

But Grandma, even though she was the moonshiner's daughter, was not fond of that part of her family history. She also wasn't fond of Grandpa's use of the 'shine'. It was many years, several children, and many, many arguments later – but Grandma's stubborn streak prevailed and alcohol was no longer part of our family history. By the time I arrived, alcohol never passed Grandpa's lips and he was an active and faithful deacon of the stone church on Glendora Avenue.

But yet, many of us grandchildren find that we have a soft spot in our hearts for the moonshine part of our family's past. After all, it *is* how Grandpa and Grandma met.

If you're writing a story set during Prohibition, or even in the post-Depression years after Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the illicit part of alcohol - moonshine and speakeasies – may be part of your character's lives. There's a whole culture around moonshining. Here are a few fun sites that can give you a peek into what times were like for them.

<https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/11/26/moonshine-and-cow-shoes/>

<https://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/women-bootleggers-during-prohibition-there-were-many/>

<http://ozarkhistorybuff.com/ozark-moonshine-alive-well-ozarks/>

http://harrisondaily.com/news/museum-musings-moonshine-was-still-big-business/article_ceccae28-2a55-11e9-b291-1377d2fb1d09.html

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/moonshine-stills>



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I love how the internet shrunk the world we live in and broadened the reach of the people we interact with. It's made it possible to learn about authors halfway around the globe that probably never would have crossed my path in the world before the internet and social media. This week's author spotlight is on one of those authors.



Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger is the author of the award-winning series, *RESCHEN VALLEY*, a family saga which takes place in northern Italy between the 1920s and the 1960s.

Because of Chrystyna's writing and her blogs, my world is larger. I learn fascinating tidbits about history and other countries every time I read something a piece by her. I think you will too. Welcome, Chrystyna!

Christina, what is your Reschen Vallen series about?

After the Great War ends, a new conflict in Europe begins: Austria's Tyrolean province is split in two, the southern half annexed by Italy. The series spans three generations. The Thalers/Steinhausers, a Tyrolean farming family whose land is being threatened, and the Grimanis, an Italian family invested in the country's industrial development. Both sides must make their way through a labyrinth of corruption, prejudice, and greed in the tumultuous interwar period. When plans to flood out the Reschen Valley to build Italy's largest reservoir are revealed, each family must decide where their loyalties lie, and at what price they will protect what they believe to be rightfully theirs.

What inspired you to write this particular story?

Before I permanently moved to Austria, I was visiting fellow travelers who took me on a trip across the Austrian-Italian border to see an opera on Reschen Lake. This was all gibberish to me. I had no idea what Reschen was, what South Tyrol was, and I certainly never saw any of Verdi's operas. As we crossed the pass, I was excited to be in Italy, except that we weren't really. There

was nothing Italian about the next villages. It all still looked like Austria. Everything was still in German albeit with Italian translations. I asked my hosts what that was all about and they kind of shrugged and said something like, “Hitler. Mussolini, some deal they made. This used to all be part of Tyrol.”



A few minutes later, as we were coming down the pass, there was a huge lake before us. It spread to the southern horizon and was nestled between the alpine peaks. It was incredible—the water was Mediterranean blue! And then I saw it... About 100 meters off the shoreline, was a huge stone church tower sticking straight out of the water. I was really frustrated when nobody could tell me what had happened here. “They flooded the valley” was not a good enough answer. That was obvious, anyway. But why? And why was this church tower still standing? There was a story

here, and it wasn’t one with a happy ending. Immediately, I began imagining the people involved, the pain, the loss. It took me another five years to find out what it was all about and, by that time, I already knew I’d be writing this series.

What drew you to write historical fiction?

I did not set out to be a historical fiction author. On the contrary, what seems like 100 years ago, I started writing contemporary fiction, and then branched out into travel narrative: I was traveling, and my stories came from the encounters I had and the connections I made with people. I love hearing people’s stories—their histories—and only recently have I recalled that I’ve always been fascinated by the books that took place in the past and were about, or based on, real and ordinary people going through extraordinary events. When I started traveling, that was when I really discovered my love for history. I took the journeys to find the stories, and the stories took me further into the journeys.

Do you have a favorite era to write in? What do you enjoy most about that era?

I don’t think it’s my favorite era but I’ve written all my books in the interwar period and WW2 so far. I set out to tell the story of my Ukrainian family in WW2 and had done so much research (I mean, SO MUCH research), that I found a lot of inspiration for further stories. After the *Reschen Valley* series, I will write at least one more WW2 novel; a short story I wrote this spring has been burning and screaming for expansion. Then I’m off to the 16th Century. I’ve got a series of 3 to 5 books plotted out based on the most powerful woman of her time... And I am really eager to get back to it.

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

Research is my bane. It's like Alice in Wonderland's hole; I fall into it, and it's hard to get out. So, for my current WIP, I've taken a totally different approach. First, I drew up the timeline I am working in and mapped out all the major events that happened in those years and months. And then I said, *Great, let the characters react to that, or be influenced by these changes, or laws, or deeds when appropriate.*

That said, I have been researching the South Tyrolean conflict for almost 15 years, so at this point—knowing my characters and their motives and directions (and the end of the story)—it's really just a matter of getting the details right. Whenever I dry up and am in need of some inspiration, I go back to the research.

Tell us about one of your favorite characters from one of your books.

I really enjoy writing scenes with Jutta Hanny. She is the innkeeper in the Reschen Valley series. She's got her finger in every pie, she's got a tongue that cracks like a whip, and she knows everyone and everything. I once saw a sign outside my neighbors' door—we live in an area and amongst a culture very similar to what I write—and it says, *The good Lord knows everything, the neighbors even more.* That is Jutta.

On the Italian end of my series, I vent through the Colonel. He is the father of one of my protagonists, and he is also my Mussolini mouthpiece. In other words, he drives the Italian side of the political events. And I do love it when Angelo and he have to spar; I catch myself cackling like a hyena as I'm writing. My husband often says he's really glad I have my writing as an outlet for my darker side.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

The historical part! I sometimes feel constrained by this timeframe within which my characters have to move. There are certain events and things and—goodness, even food or drink!—that freeze me. Sometimes, when I'm just in the flow, I might write something like, "He opened a bottle of Schweppes" and that makes me stop. I ask myself whether they would *have a bottle of Schweppes* and if so, what kind of cap or was it a twist off? And there you go, I'm off doing research instead of writing because I'm afraid some reader will go, "No, wait, they did NOT have Schweppes at that time." And then they're pulled out of the story and I, as an author, have lost them.

There are authors who refuse to do that, but many do get caught out and sometimes unjustifiably so. I've read reviews of other historical novels where I've thought, "Wait, really? Why would you presume that?" About a novel that happens in a similar time and place as mine, one reader said, "Women didn't dream about having another life outside of the farm, that just wasn't possible." Something like that just flabbergasts me. Another reader pointed out about another novel, "Hey, they don't eat bacon and eggs in France."

So here's my rebuttal, especially based on my experiences as a cross-cultural communications coach: Readers should not presume or assume that any single individual might not have different experiences to their cultural whole. People have been mobile for centuries, which means—even in the most isolated corners of the world—that they can come into contact with new things, ideas, and perspectives. For example, I've had Austrian readers say things like, *There is no such name as Hanny in South Tyrol, or, Nobody would name their dog Hund (Dog). Or, Nobody would name their son Bernd in Tyrol.* The first problem I have is the word, "nobody."

Number one, I was in the cemeteries in the valley I write about. There is a whole family called Hanny that lived in the area at that time. Number two, my friend called her cat "Cat" because "that's what it is", and I loved that. It says a lot about a person. So, why can't my protagonist, who'd rescued her dog as a small child, not just have come to the conclusion that her dog's name is "Dog," because that's the word she knows for it? And Bernd, by the way, is the son of a German, and that was his grandfather's name. And there you go...

I believe well enough that, anyone who might have traveled from France to the U.S., came back and said in their French way, "Gosh darn it, I'm hankering for some bacon and eggs like we'd had at the Hilton. What about you, Jean? You want some?" A good author, however, might provide a little insight into why the diversion happens.

We are writing historical *fiction* here, and most of us set out to write *historical* fiction but won't—or aren't able to—get everything perfect because there's a story to be told.

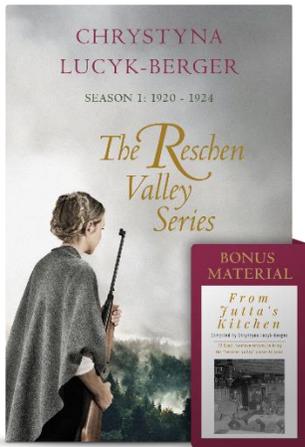
Do you have a current historical fiction work in progress? Can you give us a little teaser about it and let us know when we can look for it?

My current WIP is book 4 of 5 in the *Reschen Valley* series. It's called *The Option* and follows immediately after *Bolzano*. Katharina, Annamarie, and Angelo find themselves in the midst of the growing fanaticism of two demagogues: Hitler and Mussolini.

As Angelo struggles to secure political support behind helping the Tyroleans, Annamarie is searching for a cause she can commit to in Nazi-infested Austria. When the Third Reich and Italy strike a deal to solve the "Tyrolean Question", Katharina watches with horror as the crack in her beloved community becomes a dangerous chasm with Fascist and Nazi loyalties on opposite sides. The day of reckoning comes when the Reschen Valley community, still fighting for the rights to their land, are presented with The Option: choose to be Italian citizens and be relocated to Italian colonies on the African continent, or choose to be German and be transferred to newly-seized territories within the Third Reich. Just as she is fighting to keep her farm out of the hands of corrupt officials, that very political fraction invades and infects Katharina's own family.

Part 4 of the Reschen Valley is the fifth of six books in the series. Planned release date: June 2020.

You can find Chrystyna's books here:



Begin the series with

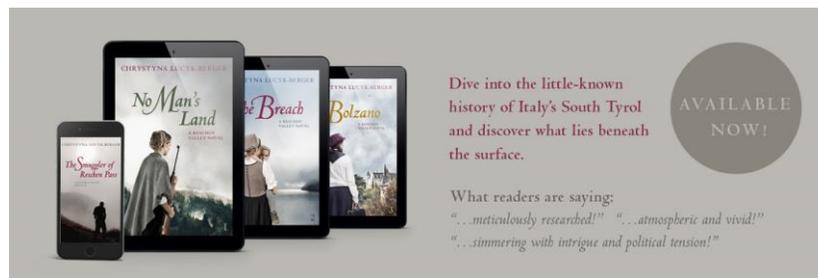
<http://mybook.to/NoMansLand1>

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<http://mybook.to/RVBoxSet1>

The next generation starts here...

<http://mybook.to/Bolzano3>



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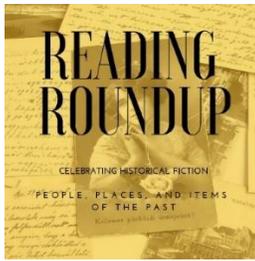
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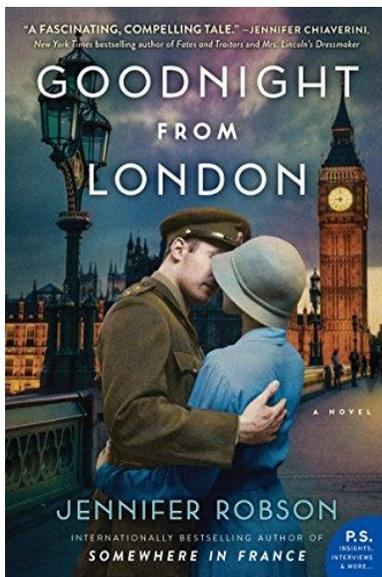
BIO: Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger is an American author living in a mountain hut in western Austria with her amazing husband, a cantankerous old tomcat, a loyal and loving mutt, and two rented ducks. She moonlights as a communications training consultant, amateur gourmet cook, armchair activist, and storyteller/entertainer.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



The 1940s

Goodnight from London

Jennifer Robson



In the summer of 1940, ambitious young American journalist Ruby Sutton gets her big break: the chance to report on the European war as a staff writer for *Picture Weekly* newsmagazine in London. She jumps at the chance, for it's an opportunity not only to prove herself but also to start fresh in a city and country that know nothing of her humble origins. But life in besieged Britain tests Ruby in ways she never imagined.

Although most of Ruby's new colleagues welcome her, a few resent her presence, not only as an American but also as a woman. She is just beginning to find her feet, to feel at home in a country that is so familiar yet so foreign, when the bombs begin to fall.

As the nightly horror of the Blitz stretches unbroken into weeks and months, Ruby must set aside her determination to remain an objective observer. When she loses everything but her life and must depend upon the kindness of strangers, she learns for the first time the depth and measure of true friendship—and what it is to love a man who is burdened by secrets that aren't his to share.

Goodnight from London, inspired in part by the wartime experiences of the author's own grandmother, is a captivating, heartfelt, and historically immersive story that readers are sure to embrace.

Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in Pages of the Past? Email me at texastrishafaye@yahoo.com to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.

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