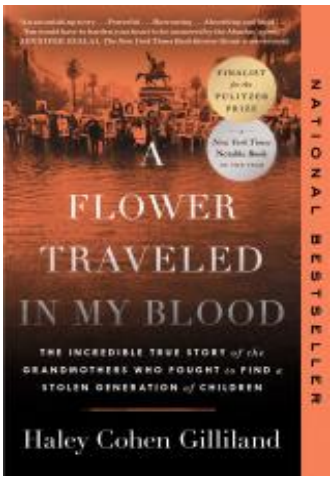
A Flower Traveled in My Blood: The Incredible True Story of the Grandmothers Who Fought to Find a Stolen Generation of Children

by Haley Cohen Gilliland



About the Book

A remarkable new talent in narrative nonfiction delivers the epic true story of a group of courageous grandmothers who fought to find their grandchildren who were stolen.

In the early hours of March 24, 1976, the streets of Buenos Aires rumble with tanks as soldiers seize the presidential palace and topple Argentina?s leader. The country is now under the control of a military junta, with army chief Jorge Rafael Videla at the helm. With quiet support from the United States and tacit approval from much of Argentina?s people, who are tired of constant bombings and gunfights, the junta swiftly launches the National Reorganization Process or *El Proceso* --- a bland name masking their ruthless campaign to crush the political left and instill the country with ?Western, Christian? values. The junta holds power until 1983 and decimates a generation.

One of the military?s most diabolical acts is kidnapping hundreds of pregnant women. After giving birth in captivity, the women are ?disappeared,? and their babies secretly given to other families --- many of them headed by police or military officers. For mothers of pregnant daughters and daughters-in-law, the source of their grief is twofold --- the disappearances of their children and the theft of their grandchildren. A group of fierce grandmothers forms the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, dedicated to finding the stolen infants and seeking justice from a nation that betrayed them. At a time when speaking out could mean death, the Abuelas confront military officers and launch protests to reach international diplomats and journalists. They become detectives, adopting disguises to observe suspected grandchildren, and even work alongside a renowned American scientist to pioneer groundbreaking genetic tests.

A FLOWER TRAVELED IN MY BLOOD is the rarest of nonfiction that reads like a novel and puts your heart in your throat. It is the product of years of extensive archival research and meticulous, original reporting. It marks the arrival of a blazing new talent in narrative journalism. In these pages, a regime tries to terrorize a country, but love prevails. The

grandmothers? stunning stories reveal new truths about memory, identity and family.

Discussion Guide

1. A FLOWER TRAVELED IN MY BLOOD is a line from Juan Gelman?s poem titled ?Epitaph.? Author Haley Cohen Gilliland chose to title the book after this poem even though it was written long before 1976. Why do you think ?Epitaph? was chosen? How does this poem serve as a frame for the story that follows?

2. How does the history provided in Part One help contextualize what led to Jorge Rafael Videla?s rise to power? What does this timeline suggest about the conditions that led to dictatorship and state-sanctioned violence?

3. How does the combination of historical accounts and personal narratives make this book unique --- not only journalism or history, but both? How would your reading be different if the book didn?t include the stories of women like Rosa?

4. This book portrays the Abuelas as simultaneously strong and emotionally affected. Alongside one another, women could feel their grief and get support from others who understood their pain. In what ways were their emotions the driving force for the organization?s efforts? How did these emotions both inspire action and affect connection/community?

5. What role did the news and media play in the Abuelas? fight for justice? How did these women use it to their advantage? How did their ideological opponents use the media against the Abuelas, and how did they respond?

6. What role did the Argentine Church and other religious organizations play in the search for the missing grandchildren?

7. When the stolen grandchildren reconnected with their biological families, their reunions weren?t always smooth. What are the different factors that made reunion so complicated?

8. Following the end of the dictatorship, the country grappled with how to recover from the brutalities of the past. They asked: Is it best to push forward and forget, or to directly confront past harm? Discuss how efforts on each side of this debate affected the Abuelas and the public at large.

9. How much of this history were you aware of prior to reading this book? How does this new knowledge inform your perspective as a civilian and political subject? Do you find yourself personally inspired or empowered by the strength of the Abuelas?

10. Various locations from this period, such as the ESMA, have been preserved or turned into historical sites. Are these places you would be interested in visiting? Why or why not? What emotions does this idea stir up inside of you?

11. If you had to pick someone from this book to interview, who would it be and why? What questions would you ask them?

12. The Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo are still fighting to this day to find all of the missing grandchildren and give them the chance to know their real identities. What about their organization has helped them achieve such longevity? What are

their strengths and what makes them so powerful in public consciousness?

Author Bio

Haley Cohen Gilliland is a journalist and the director of the Yale Journalism Initiative. She previously worked at *The Economist* for seven years, four of which were spent in Buenos Aires as the paper?s Argentina correspondent. Following her time at *The Economist*, she has focused on narrative nonfiction --- bringing history and current events to life through fact-based storytelling. She has published long-form feature articles in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Bloomberg Businessweek* and *Vanity Fair*, among other publications. She lives in New York state with her husband, two children and dogs. A FLOWER TRAVELED IN MY BLOOD is her first book.

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