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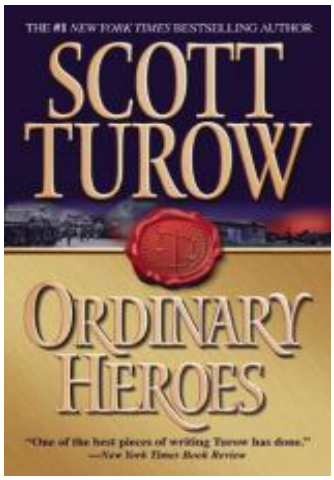
Ordinary Heroes

by Scott Turow



About the Book

Stewart Dubinsky knew his father had served in World War II. And he'd been told how David Dubin (as his father had Americanized the name that Stewart later reclaimed) had rescued Stewart's mother from the horror of the Balingen concentration camp. But when he discovers, after his father's death, a packet of wartime letters to a former fiancée, and learns of his father's court-martial and imprisonment, he is plunged into the mystery of his family's secret history and driven to uncover the truth about this enigmatic, distant man who'd always refused to talk about his war.

As he pieces together his father's past through military archives, letters, and, finally, notes from a memoir his father wrote while in prison, secretly preserved by the officer who defended him, Stewart starts to assemble a dramatic and baffling chain of events. He learns how Dubin, a JAG lawyer attached to Patton's Third Army and desperate for combat experience, got more than he bargained for when he was ordered to arrest Robert Martin, a wayward OSS officer who, despite his spectacular bravery with the French Resistance, appeared to be acting on orders other than his commanders'. In pursuit of Martin, Dubin and his sergeant are parachuted into Bastogne just as the Battle of the Bulge reaches its apex. Pressed into the leadership of a desperately depleted rifle company, the men are forced to abandon their quest for Martin and his fiery, maddeningly elusive comrade, Gita, as they fight for their lives through carnage and chaos the likes of which Dubin could never have imagined.

In reconstructing the terrible events and agonizing choices his father faced on the battlefield, in the courtroom, and in love, Stewart gains a closer understanding of his past, of his father's character, and of the brutal nature of war itself.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the effect of the V-mails on the book's opening pages. What was it like to read David Dubin's eyewitness account through the "artifacts" that comprise much of the rest of the book? Do father and son have different perceptions of life in **Ordinary Heroes**?

2. In chapter two, Dubin writes about his reasons for enlisting. What were his true motivations in going to war?

3. What are Dubin's initial impressions of Staff Sergeant Bidwell? How does Biddy's perception of racism compare to Dubin's perception of it, both before and after Biddy makes his revelations about racial passing? What common ground do the two men share?

4. How did your impressions of Robert Martin shift throughout the novel? Does Brigadier General Teedle give an accurate description of him before Dubin meets him for the first time?

5. How would you characterize Stewart's meetings with Bear Leach? How would you have handled Stewart's requests if you had been in Justice Leach's position?

6. What did you make of Corporal Bonner's comments about Teedle's sexuality in chapter eight? What would be the result of similar rumors in today's U.S. military?

7. Is Gita's allure purely based on sex appeal? How do her attitudes toward men differ from her mother's?

8. In chapter ten, Gita reveals that her mother was killed for harboring Jews. How does Dubin respond to her after this scene? What does it take for him to finally trust her?

9. Chapter thirteen ends with Leach's recollection that Dubin feared his children would learn the truth about him. To what extent is it necessary to keep secrets from our descendants? To what extent is this harmful? Do you agree with the Talmud's aphorism, mentioned in the novel's first chapter, that a father should draw his son close with one hand and push him away with the other?

10. How do the brutal December battles affect Dubin? How does he reconcile his roles as legal assistant and soldier after these scenes? What does he mean when he tells Grace he regrets being a "soldier in earnest," in his letter to her at the end of chapter twenty-seven?

11. What did it take to transform Gita Lodz into Gilda/Gella Rosner? When did it become her dream to have an ordinary life?

12. Was it unpatriotic of Martin to try to keep not only the Soviets but also the United States from securing knowledge of Germany's weapons of mass destruction? Were Martin's actions rational? Would you have let him escape?

13. What is your understanding of the relationship between Gita and Martin? What does war teach Dubin about love? Would he have had much chance of a good marriage with Grace?

14. How do Stewart's findings affect the dynamic of his family --- his relationships with his sister and mother, and the memory of David Dubin?

15. Scott Turow writes that although **Ordinary Heroes** is completely a work of his imagination, the initial inspiration came from his father, who was a field surgeon in Europe during World War II. What legacies of war exist in your family? What stories of heroism and mystery are part of your family history?

16. What similarities and differences exist between **Ordinary Heroes** and Turow's other novels? From Turow's point of view, what are the makings of a hero?

Author Bio

Scott Turow, a writer and former practicing lawyer, is the author of 13 bestselling works of fiction, including PRESUMED INNOCENT, PRESUMED GUILTY and SUSPECT. Mr. Turow has also published two nonfiction books, including ONE L, about his experience as a law student. His books have been translated into more than 40 languages, sold more than 30 million copies worldwide, and have been adapted into movies and television projects. He has frequently contributed essays and op-ed pieces to publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic*.

Critical Praise

"A captivating tale about the things ordinary people are sometimes required to do in extraordinary circumstances . . . Satisfying and compelling."

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