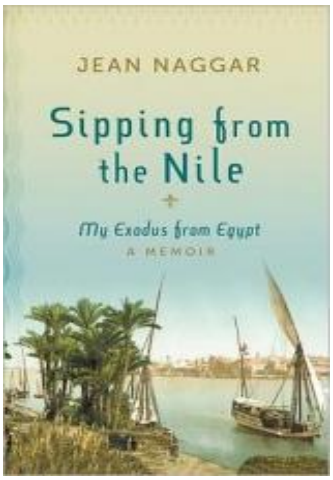
Sipping From the Nile: My Exodus From Egypt

by Jean Naggar



About the Book

Born into a prominent, sophisticated Jewish family who spend time in Europe and live in the Middle East, author Jean Naggar?s coming of age memoir tells the story of her protected youth in an exotic multicultural milieu. To Naggar her childhood seemed a magical time that would never come to an end. But in 1956, Egyptian President Nasser?s nationalizing of the Suez Canal set in motion events that would change her life forever.

An enchanted way of life suddenly ended by multinational hostilities, her close-knit extended family is soon scattered far and wide. Naggar?s own family moves to London where she finishes her schooling and is swept into adulthood and the challenge of new horizons in America. Speaking for a different wave of immigrants whose Sephardic origins highlight the American Jewish story through an unfamiliar lens, Naggar traces her personal journey through lost worlds and difficult transitions, exotic locales and strong family values. The story resonates for all in this poignant exploration of the innocence of childhood in a world breaking apart.

Discussion Guide

1. In the beginning of the book, Jean sees a black snake in the garden. What does the snake symbolize? How does the discovery of the snake affect the tone of the story?

2. Early on, Jean talks about her Auntie Helen and her ties to Israel and the Zionist movement. Though they lived in the same house, Jean was never aware of her aunt's Israeli connections until later. What does this reveal about Jean's childhood and her understanding of the larger forces around her?

3. Jean appears to be somewhat conflicted about marriage, as there are many instances in her family history of women who have been robbed of an education, and even a childhood, by marriage. Yet, as a teenage girl, she longs to get married and is distraught when she is told that she cannot marry her first love. How have the marriages of the women

before her shaped Jean's understanding of the institution of marriage?

4. The narrator describes the celebration of Passover dinner in rich and abundant detail. Discuss the irony of celebrating the exodus of the Jews of Pharaoh?s Egypt for this particular family, whose lives are torn apart by their own exodus during the Suez Crisis. How does this represent the unease between Egypt and its Jewish population?

5. The theme of isolation comes up several times throughout the narrative. Jean and her siblings are isolated from the adult world in their nursery, and the family compound, complete with its own synagogue isolates them from the rest of Cairo. How is this isolation a metaphor for the Jews? relationship with Egypt and the larger Arab world?

6. Though Jean considers Egypt to be her home, her parents send her to school in Britain and she grows up speaking English, French and Italian. In light of Egypt's colonial past, how does her education affect her ties to her homeland? How do her schooling and her upbringing shape her later in life?

7. Several people in the memoir barely escape death: Jean's great-great grandfather Ezekiel leaves an inn in the middle of the night after hearing a voice in a dream and escapes a massacre; Bert, the driver, avoids a bombing when he brings cough medicine to Jean?s Uncle Ellis, and Jean herself changes flights, thus avoiding being on a plane that crashes. Do you think this recurring theme of near-death suggests that the author believes she cheated death by getting out of Egypt?

8. How does personal spirituality, as opposed to religion, mold the lives of the Mosseri clan from both an ethnic and traditional standpoint? What other cultural influences play into the author?s and her family?s belief in fate, the power of prayer and their various superstitions?

9. Jean describes her overprotective family as keeping her ?in stasis, waiting for life to happen, sensing powerful darknesses around me but never touching them.? Referring to the Suez Crisis that forced their exodus, she says ?The moment when my parents' world shattered was also the moment that set me free.? How was she set free by leaving Egypt?

10. After Jean's family leaves Egypt, she moves to the UK and eventually to New York, where she goes on to have a successful career as a literary agent. How might her life have been different had she stayed in Egypt?

11. At the end of the book, Jean is talking to her grandchildren about making *kaak*, a traditional Arabic dish. How does food function in the book as a way to tie the present generations to the past?

12. What does the family's relationship with their Egyptian Muslim driver, Osta Hussein, whom Jean describes as 'above suspicion' even at the height of the Suez Crisis, represent? What does it reveal about personal loyalty versus loyalty to one's country or religion?

13. By the time she is writing this story, the author has close ties to Europe, the Arab world and the United States. Discuss the ways in which she is influenced by all of these regions. In what ways is she a product of all three?

14. After the Suez crisis, tens of thousands of Egyptian Jews were forced to leave Egypt along with citizens of French and British descent. While the French and British citizens had countries to return to, the Jews, including Jean's family, were scattered across the globe. Discuss the implications of this difference, in particular with regard to Israel and the

Jewish diaspora.

15. When Jean's mother marries her father, she goes to live in the family's compound with her husband's mother and sister instead of establishing a home of her own for her family. How is this a metaphor for the family's sense of displacement and greater search for a home?

16. In the book, Jean returns to Egypt one final time in 1990. So much has changed that she finds her homeland nearly unrecognizable. What do you think the author would make of the seismic changes in Egypt in 2011? Would she think it represented a true break from Egypt's troubled past or more of the same?

17. In this age of email, there will be no handwritten letters lost in an attic to show future generations how we lived and who we really were. How does the personal exploration involved in writing a memoir affect the writer? Future generations? Is this just a matter of personal closure or an attempt to preserve the histories of individuals to add depth to the political overlay that dominates every ?history??

Author Bio

Jean Naggar established the Jean V. Naggar Literary Agency, Inc. in 1978 in New York City, where she had previously worked as an editor, writer and translator. Her eclectic, broad-ranging taste in fiction and nonfiction has led to many award-winning titles and many best-selling books in the past few years. She is considered an ace strategist by her clients, and has sold a wide range of fiction and nonfiction.

Critical Praise

"Jean Naggar's memoir **Sipping from the Nile** brings the world of Egypt's privileged class to us like a "Downton Abbey" set in Cairo. This is history told with the fluidity of poetry, the sensuality of life, and with empathy that resonates from an extended family determined to survive upheaval."

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