

The Lost Baker of Vienna

by Sharon Kurtzman



About the Book

A historical novel inspired by the experiences of the author's own family after the Holocaust, a sweeping saga about survival, loss, love and the reverberating effects of war.

In 2018, Zoe Rosenzweig is reeling after the loss of her beloved grandfather, a Holocaust survivor. She becomes obsessed with finding out what really happened to her family during the war.

Vienna, 1946: Chana Rosenzweig has endured the horrors of war to find herself, her mother and her younger brother finally free in Vienna. But freedom doesn't look like they'd imagined it would, as they struggle to make a living and stay safe.

Despite the danger, Chana sneaks out most nights to return to the hotel kitchen where she works as a dishwasher, using the quiet nighttime hours to bake her late father's recipes. Soon, Chana finds herself caught in a dangerous love triangle, torn between the black-market dealer who has offered marriage and protection, and the apprentice baker who shares her passions. How will Chana balance her love of baking against her family's need for security?

THE LOST BAKER OF VIENNA affirms the unbreakable bonds of family, shining a light on the courageous spirit of WWII refugees as they battle to survive the overwhelming hardships of a world torn apart.

Discussion Guide

1. THE LOST BAKER OF VIENNA explores many social issues that affected people during and after World War II, including antisemitism, hate, and women having agency over their bodies, lives and futures. We see these problems today, too. How have these issues evolved since the 1940s, and how have they stayed the same?

2. Baking is an important element in this novel. It connects Chana to her father and her heritage, it brings her happiness during difficult months in Vienna, it leads her to a rewarding friendship with Elias, and it gives her hope for the future --- a reason to fight for her independence. Do you have a talent or interest that has shaped your life in meaningful ways?
3. During the war years, Chana's blond hair and light eyes could have allowed her to pass as a gentile and save herself. In Vienna, her mother urges her to use her beauty to land a job, though doing so makes Chana uncomfortable. Later, she strategically chooses when to reveal the scars on her chest, and when to hide them. What do you make of Chana's choices to display or conceal her beauty? What would you have done in those situations?
4. Ruth pushes Chana to marry to ensure their family's safety even though marriage isn't what Chana wants for herself. How do you view Chana's relationship with her mother? Do you find Ruth to be a sympathetic character? Or did you empathize more with Chana? Why?
5. Chana, Elias and Meyer each lost family during the war. In what ways do you think survivor guilt manifests in their postwar lives?
6. Chana idolizes her father, Jacob, and his talent for baking, though Ruth was occasionally frustrated by the depth of his passion. How do you view Jacob as a husband and a father? How do you think his passion for his business affected his family before and after the war?
7. The story depicts the hardships of war and postwar life, yet many of the characters still manage to experience moments of joy. How do they find joy during those dark times? How have you found joy during hard times in your own life?
8. The love triangle between Chana, Elias and Meyer is an intricate and emotional part of this novel. Were you rooting for Meyer or Elias to ultimately win Chana over? Why?
9. Love in all its forms is on display in this novel, including romantic love, sibling love, love between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and even love between friends. Which relationship in this story is your favorite and why?
10. What lessons does Zoe take away from discovering the truth about her family's past? How do you think this knowledge will influence her future? How has your family's history impacted your life?
11. Sharon Kurtzman's inspiration for this novel came from learning about her own family's Holocaust experiences. What do you think the author hoped you would take away from this story? What scene or image will stay with you and why?

Author Bio

Sharon Kurtzman worked in television marketing before pursuing her dream of becoming a writer. She earned her MFA

in fiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and her undergraduate degree from Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications. THE LOST BAKER OF VIENNA was inspired by the war and postwar experiences of her own family, who were Holocaust survivors. Kurtzman lives in North Carolina with her husband. They have two adult children.

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