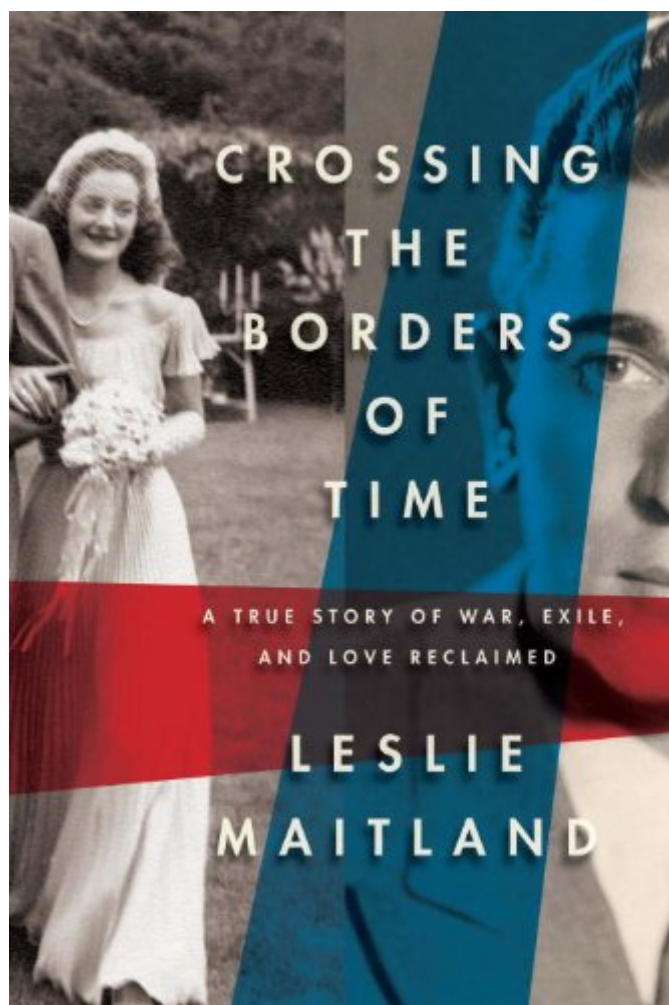


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Crossing The Borders Of Time: A True Story Of War, Exile, And Love Reclaimed



Synopsis

On a pier in Marseille in 1942, with desperate refugees pressing to board one of the last ships to escape France before the Nazis choked off its ports, an 18-year-old German Jewish girl was ripped from the arms of the Catholic Frenchman she loved and promised to marry. As the Lipari carried Janine and her family to Casablanca on the first leg of a perilous journey to safety in Cuba, she would read through her tears the farewell letter that Roland had slipped in her pocket:

“Whatever the length of our separation, our love will survive it, because it depends on us alone. I give you my vow that whatever the time we must wait, you will be my wife. Never forget, never doubt.”

Five years later “her fierce desire to reunite with Roland first obstructed by war and then, in secret, by her father and brother “Janine would build a new life in New York with a dynamic American husband. That his obsession with Ayn Rand tormented their marriage was just one of the reasons she never ceased yearning to reclaim her lost love. Investigative reporter Leslie Maitland grew up enthralled by her mother’s accounts of forbidden romance and harrowing flight from the Nazis. Her book is both a journalist’s vivid depiction of a world at war and a daughter’s pursuit of a haunting question: what had become of the handsome Frenchman whose picture her mother continued to treasure almost fifty years after they parted? It is a tale of memory that reporting made real and a story of undying love that crosses the borders of time.

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Customer Reviews

Maybe I'm being chauvinistic, but as a reporter since 1966, I've long believed that news people make the best writers. Think Ernest Hemingway, honing his writing and reporting skills at the Kansas City Star and the Toronto Star. And think Leslie Maitland, a prize-winning former investigative reporter for the New York Times whose "Crossing the Borders of Time: A True Story of War, Exile, and Love Reclaimed" is a panoramic work of nonfiction that I believe Hemingway would have been proud to put his name on. The book has the power of "War and Peace," the movie "Casablanca" and the romanticism of "Doctor Zhivago" -- reading like a novel but with the resonance of reality. Maitland used all the skills she acquired as reporter to tell the story of how her German Jewish mother, born Johanna Gunzburger in Freiburg, Germany, in 1923 managed to flee the Nazi killing machine in 1938, with her father, mother, sister and brother, landing first in Mulhouse, France, moving as the Germans defeated the French in June 1940, finally leaving on the last ship out of Marseille, France in 1942 before the harbors were sealed. Barred from entering the U.S. due to an indifferent FDR administration and an actively anti-Semitic State Department under Cordell Hull, the Gunzburger family -- father Samuel Sigmar Gunzburger, a German Army WWI veteran, his wife Alice, their daughters Gertrude (Trudi) and Johanna (later Janine) and their son Norbert -- spent more than a year in a Cuban detention camp before finally securing papers allowing them to move to Miami and later New York City. As a child, Leslie learned of her mother's first love, called Roland Arcieri in the book, a French Catholic who tried to contact Janine when she was pregnant with the future investigative reporter.

Leslie Maitland's "Crossing the Borders of Time" is a superb book about the fluidity of family, love, and home. Maitland, a former NYT reporter, has written about her mother's family and the physical journey they took from Germany into exile and the memories - both positive and painful - they took with them. And she writes of their new life in the United States, where they brought those memories and connections. Maitland's book actually covers several subjects - the life in Germany and then France in the run-up to WW2 - as well as how the Gunzburger family made their way in perilous times and conditions to the United States via north Africa, with a short stay in Cuba. The book continues with their post-war life, including Leslie's parents' difficult marriage, which was plagued by infidelity; her mother's continued yearning for the love of her life, a young Catholic man she left

behind in France and by her father's physical infidelity with several women and by his emotional one with the teachings of author Ayn Rand. Maitland's book covers so much territory and all of it painted with a deft hand. One of the most interesting parts to me is her telling of returning to Germany and France with her parents in the early 1990's. They returned to the cities of Freiburg in Germany where her mother was born in 1923 and raised until the 1930's when the family fled to the (perceived) safety of Mulhouse, France. (Maitland covered the trip in a series of articles for the NYT, which I vaguely remember reading and thinking they were interesting. I didn't think I'd be reading 20 years later a book about the family.

I'm not done with the book yet, but I'm about halfway through and I'm perfectly keen on writing this review before I finish it because it's absolutely amazing. A can't-put-it-down kind of read, which I attribute to the author's background as an investigative journalist. I find that journalists make the best book authors, because their talent is simply stretched out over hundreds of pages rather than across a broadsheet. The book tells the true story of the author's maternal ancestors and their experiences prior to, during, and after the Holocaust. The family hails from the fine line between Germany and France, Maitland's mother grows up bouncing back between two worlds until they are no longer welcome in France as Germans and no longer welcome in Germany as Jews. Their journey from Europe to Cuba and on to the U.S. is harrowing, shocking, and Maitland describes it in vivid detail. And the entire story is told through a lost-love narrative between Maitland's Jewish mother and her Alsatian Catholic love. A few times I had to stop and sit back to remind myself that Maitland herself wasn't there; her storytelling is that good. I've learned some shocking things about the experience of Alsatians, French and German Jews, and those caught between France and Germany during Hitler's reign. Did you know that when the Nazis went to France, they basically walked straight in to Paris without firing a shot? That they turned the clocks of France to German time? (So much for time zones, eh?) Also: There are some outstanding pictures and documents in this book, thanks to Maitland's family's penchant for holding on to important, meaningful family paperwork. It really makes the story come to life.

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