



Gratz Insider, Summer 2017 - Story Continuation

[To return to the newsletter, close this page.]

Summer Reading Suggestions

Here's what people at Gratz are reading or recommending:

Mindy Blechman, Assistant Director of Admissions; Coordinator of Holocaust and Genocide Studies
[In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin](#) (Erik Larson, 2011): Although not far enough along in this book to recommend it yet, Blechman says that it received excellent reviews. It is a work of narrative nonfiction in which Erik Larson examines life in Germany during Hitler's rise to power through the eyes of an American diplomat and his family.

Stephen Chortanoff, Adjunct Instructor in the Master of Arts in Education Program
[Man's Search for Meaning](#)* (Viktor E. Frankl, 1946): Since the original publication of this book, there have been multiple editions and multiple translations. In the first part of the book, Frankl, who was a psychiatrist both before and after the Holocaust, describes his life in the concentration camps, and in the second part, his psychological perspective, based on what he learned from his experience. Characterizing the book as life-changing, Chortanoff says:

I love how Frankl was able to demonstrate the true nature of humanity as he discovered it in the death camps and in his practice. I agree with his theory about striving to live a meaningful life, no matter the circumstances. In short, life is about choices more than anything else. This perspective is very empowering.

Dr. Joseph Davis, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies

Prof. Davis had several recommendations:

- [Paris to the Moon](#) (Adam Gopnik, 2000): This book is a series of essays about the five years that the author spent with his wife and baby living in Paris as a journalist for The New Yorker. Davis read "Paris to the Moon" this summer, calling it "even better than expected." In fact, he describes reading it on a bus, and having to put it down because he was laughing so hard.
- [The View From Flyover Country: Essays by Sarah Kendzior](#) (Sarah Kendzior, 2015 - only available on Kindle): Also a collection of essays, this book represents what journalist Sarah Kendzior considers the best of her work during her tenure as a columnist for Al Jazeera English. The

articles cover a wide range of subjects, such as the economy, race and religion, higher education, the media and foreign policy.

- [Kristin Lavransdatter](#) (Sigrid Undset, originally published from 1920-1922): Davis recommends this book to readers of historical novels. It is actually a collection of three books set in Medieval Norway. The author, Sigrid Undset, won the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- [Black Jews in Africa and the Americas](#) (Tudor Parfitt, 2013): This book explains why numerous African ethnic groups came to consider themselves Jewish. Warning that “it isn’t beach reading,” Davis goes on to describe this book as the best Jewish book he read last year.

Rabbi Erin Hirsh, Interim President

[Rashi’s Daughters](#)* (Maggie Anton): This three-volume series, with a separate book devoted to each daughter, consists of “Book I: Joheved” (2005), “Book II: Miriam” (2007) and “Book III: Rachel” (2009). They are novels based on the lives of the Talmudic scholar Rashi and his three daughters.

Rabbi Hirsh is hoping to reread all three books this summer. She says, “They paint a rich image of the world of Rashi with refreshingly contemporary sensitivities. They are perfect for those who would like some easy but substantive Jewish summer reading.”

Nancy Nitzberg, Director of Library Services

Recently, our director of library services has been reading up on the history of the Gratz Family. In addition to numerous articles and manuscripts on this topic, she has read the following:

- [Letters of Rebecca Gratz](#) (Rabbi David Philipson, D.D., 1929)
- [Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America](#) * (Dianne Ashton, 2015)
- [Barnard and Michael Gratz: Their Lives and Times](#) * (Sidney M. Fish, 1994)
- [The History of the Jews of Philadelphia From Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson](#)* (Edwin Wolf, 2d., and Maxwell Whiteman, 1956)

Nitzberg has also satisfied her interest in history with two works by author Ron Chernow. She read Chernow’s book [Washington: A Life](#) (2010), and has been listening to the audio version of his book [Alexander Hamilton](#) (2004) on long road trips.

Dr. Ruth Sandberg, Leonard and Ethel Landau Professor of Rabbinics and Director of the Certificate Program in Jewish-Christian Studies

[Encountering Other Faiths](#) (Maria Hornung, 2007): Prof. Sandberg provided her own brief review:

This little book is a quick read, but it offers a great deal on the subject of interfaith studies and interfaith dialogue. The book discusses the ground rules for effective interfaith dialogue, some of the theoretical and theological underpinnings to interreligious dialogue, and the process by which we best encounter other faiths. Only a hundred pages, it offers those new to interfaith dialogue an excellent introduction, and includes step-by-step instructions for those wishing to lead interfaith dialogue discussions. The excellent bibliography also contains references to many of the foremost scholars and researchers in the field of interfaith relations.

Rosalie St. Clair, Adjunct Instructor in the Master of Arts in Education Program

Her suggestions are all World War II-era books:

- [The Women in the Castle](#) (Jessica Shattuck, 2017): This New York Times bestselling work of historical fiction tells the story of the widows and children of three men who died as resisters to the Nazis, and depicts how the women struggle together to build lives for themselves after the war. The book has been compared to the likes of “The Nightingale,” “Sarah’s Key” and “The Light Between Oceans.”
- [Lilac Girls](#) (Martha Hall Kelly, 2016): Summarizing this book, St. Clair says:

The lives of three young women - a Polish teen, a German doctor and a New York socialite - intertwine during World War II in this compelling historical novel. The story is based on true events and real people, who demonstrate fierce dedication, unspeakable cruelty and amazing bravery. Caroline Ferriday (the New York socialite) is definitely one of the unsung heroes of a time in history that should never be forgotten.
- [The Paris Architect](#) (Charles Belfoure, 2013): Another New York Times bestseller, this novel focuses on the life of a fictional French architect, who grudgingly - at first - gets pulled into a scheme to build intricately concealed places for French Jews to hide in Nazi-occupied France.

Recommended Reads: The Latest & Greatest in Jewish Fiction for Adults

For the last couple years, in addition to recommendations from Gratz faculty and staff, we have included a comprehensive [list](#) of recommended Jewish fiction, created and updated annually by Rachel Kamin and her colleagues. Kamin is director of The Joseph and Mae Gray Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park, Illinois. One of her collaborators on this year’s list was Rosalind Reisner, a writer, speaker and librarian, whose areas of expertise include Jewish literature. The other was Judy Weidman, librarian at Congregation Beth Israel in Houston, Texas. The women compiled the list for their presentation at the Association of Jewish Libraries Conference in June. Kamin kindly granted us permission to share this list with our readers.

*Titles available in the Gratz College Tuttleman Library.