

Letter from the President April 2024

We are people of the book, and I have always loved books, and have maybe too many in my home. When I moved to Springfield, I decided to volunteer with Friends of the Library, and I work in what is called the sorting room several hours a week in preparation for the FOL semi - annual sales. Since the next sale is in April, I have books on my mind. Here are reviews and a quick summary of some books I've read, one fiction and two non-fictions, all on some facet of Jewish life and culture.

Exodus by Leon Uris

Of course, many years ago I saw the movie, Exodus. All I remember is Paul Newman standing on the deck of a ship looking with those big blue eyes at a woman who I think was Eva Marie Saint. When my online book club suggested historical fiction books, Exodus was one of the choices. I put it on the Kindle app on my phone and read it as my husband drove from Missouri to New York. I could not put it down. I'm sure the author wove in a large dose of fiction using the bones of history to tell his story. Some of the references mentioned real people and I know of some of the events. In the end, it did not matter to me which stories were real and which were imagination. I do know I felt immense pride and conviction as I read about the men and women fighting to protect their homes and land in pre-state Israel. Their determination and need NOT to give up showed loud and clear.

Rhapsody in Schmaltz by Michael Wex

If you have never seen or heard the words rhapsody and schmaltz in the same sentence, you can now cross that off your bucket list. Micheal Wex writes about the foods the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe cooked, loved, and brought with them to the United States. Schmaltz, you may have heard the word but don't know what it is, is simmered chicken fat and skin in water, cooked over low heat and sometimes has chopped onion added for flavor. The book covers everything from dietary laws, to how foods changed and were adopted as the people moved across Europe. The same dish would be made different ways depending on which country people lived in and the availability or scarcity of ingredients, or the influence of the neighboring community. With a good dose of research and a small dose of humor, Wex narrates a very readable history of foods.

The Soup Has Many Eyes by Joann Rose Leonard

This book was recommended to me by an email friend in California who was friends with the author, z"l. She thought that as a Jewish woman whose family came from Russia, I would enjoy and relate to this book. As the author would cook a pot of soup in old family pot using an even older unwritten family recipe, she would hear the voices and stories of her family. She remembers her uncles and a great - uncle in Russia who hid under the floor of a barn for almost a month to escape the pogrom. She hears the discussions back and forth between family members, hearing their voices and knowing how each would respond. What she gives to her family is more than soup and more than stories. We all get to benefit from the legacy of her history and heritage.

We each have our favorites, those books that moved us to laughter, anger, or tears. Maybe the book started new thoughts, or a new way of doing something. I learned something from each of these, maybe only a sentence or two, and it was enough to make it worthwhile.

Irene Francis
Board President