



The Secrets of Flight

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This captivating, breakout novel—told in alternating viewpoints—brings readers from the skies of World War II to the present day, where a woman is prepared to tell her secrets at last.

Estranged from her family since just after World War II, Mary Browning has spent her entire adult life hiding from her past. Now eighty-seven years old and a widow, she is still haunted by secrets and fading memories of the family she left behind. Her one outlet is the writing group she's presided over for a decade, though she's never written a word herself. When a new member walks in—a fifteen-year-old girl who reminds her so much of her beloved sister Sarah—Mary is certain fate delivered Elyse Strickler to her for a reason.

Mary hires the serious-eyed teenager to type her story about a daring female pilot who, during World War II, left home for the sky and gambled everything for her dreams—including her own identity.

As they begin to unravel the web of Mary's past, Mary and Elyse form an unlikely friendship. Together they discover it's never too late for second chances and that sometimes forgiveness is all it takes for life to take flight in the most unexpected ways.

The Secrets of Flight Details

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From Reader Review The Secrets of Flight for online ebook

Ingrid Fasquelle says

Maggie Leffler est médecin de formation et romancière. Née à Columbia, dans le Maryland, elle a poursuivi ses études à l'université du Delaware et a rejoint l'AmeriCorps avant d'entrer à la St George's University School of Medicine. Elle exerce à Pittsburgh, en Pennsylvanie. La Vieille dame qui avait vécu dans les nuages est son troisième roman dans lequel elle relate le rôle courageux et désintéressé joué par les femmes pilotes américaines pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

S'inspirant de faits réels, cette belle saga intergénérationnelle sur une famille perdue puis retrouvée rend un ardent hommage au courage de ces femmes remarquables, longtemps méprisées et/ou oubliées de l'Histoire, et qui, pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, ont pourtant participé activement à l'effort de guerre. Sans toutefois aller au combat, ces femmes admirables ont piloté des appareils militaires de tous modèles et effectué tous types de missions, volant en solo, souvent au péril de leur vie.

Le roman de Maggie Leffler aura nécessité pas moins de cinq versions et exigé quatre ans et demi de travail avant d'être publié. Mais grâce à son travail de documentation acharné, l'auteure a réussi l'exploit de rendre les WASP plus vraies que nature ! Leur fraîcheur, leur enthousiasme généreux et leur loyauté sans faille imprègnent chacune des pages de ce roman !

Pour devenir aviatrice et vivre pleinement sa passion, Miri ira jusqu'à renier ses origines juives et sa famille. Son caractère pétillant et indépendant, sa détermination donnent énormément de relief à l'intrigue imaginée par Maggie Leffler ! Loin des paillettes et du glamour dont l'imaginaire collectif pare ces aviatrices pionnières, l'histoire de Miri captive et bouleverse. Incontestablement, Maggie Leffner a su tirer le meilleur des échanges et des conversations qu'elle a pu avoir avec d'anciens membres des WASP. Elle signe un roman au charme fou, une saga richement documentée, à la fois tendre et touchante, qui ne peut qu'émouvoir le lecteur ! On y découvre deux personnalités sincères et attachantes, autour desquelles gravite une galerie de personnages secondaires savoureux !

La vieille dame qui avait vécu dans les nuages est un régal d'émotions et d'humour, qui vous fera à coup sûr vibrer de la première à la dernière page ! À lire absolument pour s'évader et tout oublier !

Joy says

I won an uncorrected proof from a Goodreads giveaway.

I liked this story. I was hooked right away with both the main characters. It was an easy read. While it was an easy read it did touch on a few things such as racism, sexism and even end of life choices. These were only light touches and they did not bog down the story. It never became a slog to go on with finding out what happened next.

I think I will recommend this book for my book club, which is the highest compliment. It is a little light (although it did have one of the three requirements, death, doom and destruction) for us but we need one of those once in a while.

Brenna says

I like that I am finding more books written on women during WWII. The historical fiction part is told in flashbacks, but I did not find it confusing. The primary characters are women, and all well developed. The main character is only 15, but mature, and I like the way the writer wrote her experiences with family issues, best friend arguments, and meeting boys. Definitely a good read, especially for someone interested in WASPs, the female civilian pilots who assisted the military during the war.

Donna says

3.5 stars, but will round up to 4.

This was historical fiction, as an 87 year old woman reflects on her past as a pilot during WWII and her family drama all while dealing with her lonely present. It was also a story of a teenage girl who was helping this woman write her memoir. It felt like two sincere stories that toggled back and forth in time as their friendship deepens and their lives intertwine. I think I liked the story of the teenage girl a little more which made the toggling a little bothersome, but overall, I liked this.

Mariine says

3,5*

Sue says

It is so wonderful to read a book with an older main character. I get so tired of reading books about 20 somethings that reading about 87 year old Mary is a breath of fresh air. And to top that its a wonderful book with two strong main characters. Along with Mary and her secrets, there is 15 year old Elyse who wants to be a writer and who becomes Mary's friend and helper. A very strong bond is built between the two characters as Mary shares the secrets of her life with the teenager. The author did great research into the women pilot's of WWII and more needs to be written about these often forgotten heroic women. There is much more in the novel and in Mary's life than her time as a pilot and with Elyse's help, she is able to reveal it all. This is a wonderful book. Its both a coming of age story of Elyse but also an summation of life story for Mary. (Thanks to LibraryThing for providing this book for a fair and honest review.)

Diane S ? says

3.5 Miriam at 87 has presided over her writing group for years, a group that consists of other elderly would be writers. So when a young, 15 year old Elyse walks in to join the group, they are all surprised. Elyse will be the catalyst for the unveiling of Miriam's former life, a time when she had a different name, a much different career as a member of the woman's flying corps during the war. Secrets, heartaches, much on flying and these amazing women, love lost and disappointments galore.

Loved reading about these women who went unnoticed for so long. This story is interspersed with Elyse and her problems at home and with a boy she has a serious crush on. Both will learn to lean on and trust the other. I guess this was just a little too sentimental a read for me, so many good parts though, worth reading for sure. The ending maybe a little to coincidental, too pat. So a mixed read for me but one I know will be embraced by different readers.

BOOKSOMEREADS says

5

A story of love and loss, regret and hope. **The Secrets of Flight** is a real gem. It is a wonderful story told between alternating viewpoints and also between the past and the present.

I love historical fiction, so I really enjoyed reading this. It's not too heavy as it alternates between Mary's story in present time New York, as well as Elyse's so it's not just focused on the past. Even if you're not a fan of historical fiction, you might still enjoy this. I simply couldn't put it down and I would have probably read it in one sitting if I hadn't started this book so late in the day.

The storyline and plot twists kept me intrigued. It's a great reminder of the difficult decisions and sacrifices we're all capable of making for our families and for the people we love and care about, and of the shame and regret one has to carry throughout life when mistakes are made and promises are broken, as well as the importance of acceptance and forgiveness. The dialogues and character interactions, as well as the realism of the plot, and the way the story has been written had me in awe of the author's writing.

I found myself invested in Mary and Elyse right from the very start. The author has a way of making her characters; even the ones who only make one or two appearances, matter to you. She is just so good at developing her characters and making you care about them and about what happens to them in each and every chapter that I was hooked!

Mary's story and Elyse's story are equally interesting. They're both strong and brave and funny. It was a joy to witness their growing friendship and I really wanted to know more about them.

I certainly felt a number of emotions reading this book. I laughed, I cried, I even grinned like an idiot at times. I admit I was both happy and sad when I was done reading this because I didn't want their stories to end. It was definitely an emotional ride.

I highly recommend reading this book.

Memorable Quote

"What is it about being on the precipice of change that makes one capable of joy and fear simultaneously?"

"The truth is, none of us wants to think about things we can't change. If I worry that maybe I'm next, I'm already done for, so instead I wake up each day and tell myself there's a reason I'm here."

RATING

Characters - ★★★★★

Setting - ★★★★★

Writing - ★★★★★

Plot - ★★★★★

Overall - ★★★★★

Received an ARC of this in e-book format in exchange for an honest review.

Add me on Twitter!

prettybooks says

20/20

Comme souvent quand on parle des combats de femmes dans l'Histoire, j'ai été très émue par ce récit. On a trop souvent tendance à oublier par où certains ont dû passer pour que nous puissions aujourd'hui avoir des droits. C'est également le cas pour certaines professions qui ont bien trop longtemps été réservées aux hommes. C'est donc un roman très touchant qui nous offre une superbe relation avec des personnages forts qui se battent pour réaliser leurs rêves, quels qu'ils soient.

Ma chronique : <https://myprettybooks.wordpress.com/2...>

Carrie Schmidt (Reading is My SuperPower) says

The Secrets of Flight by Maggie Leffler is rich with characters and history and family and life. It addresses the importance of faith in our formation while spotlighting a host of courageous women from the past as well as the present.

The narrative alternates between the perspectives of the two main characters – Mary/Miriam and Elyse. Together, they may make an unlikely pair but a delightful one nonetheless. I would enjoy knowing both of them – as well as their rather eccentric writing club!

As far as this dual first-person perspective, it flows quite well. It took a bit, early on, for me to figure out which voice was narrating at any given time – until orienting facts were given – but as the story progressed and I became acquainted with their distinctive voices I had no more problems telling them apart.

The historical vignettes were fascinating – a glimpse into life as not only a Jew in America during WW2 (discrimination wasn't only going on in Germany) but also life as a woman in America during WW2.

Engaging from word one, Maggie Leffler's latest novel is a mix of not only historical and contemporary but a mix of heartwarming and heartwrenching as well. You will laugh and cry and sink into this story as it envelops you like a warm blanket. Yet, it's not a sunshine and roses type of story. There is family drama. There is medical drama. There is historical drama. Life isn't always pretty, and it certainly wasn't pretty during the era of World War 2 America. While Leffler shines a light on some less than stellar moments, she also spotlights courage and love, as well as faith and hope that endure despite insurmountable odds.

(I received a copy of this book in exchange for only my honest review.)

(Reviewer's note: This is a general market book. Read my review at [Reading Is My SuperPower](#) for any hesitations I may have in recommending it.)

Shomeret says

I liked the octogenarian protagonist, Mrs. Browning, the most--both in the present and in the past when she was an aviator in the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). She was such a wonderful character. I also love novels that deal with the WASP. I always learn something new from them. This time I learned about their mascot, Fifinella, a winged female gremlin who was created by Walt Disney.

I disliked the teenage protagonist at first. In fact, I nearly stopped reading because she seemed stereotypical to me. Yet she does mature and become more interesting over the course of the narrative. Her friendship with Mrs. Browning facilitated this process.

Mrs. Browning's history deals with a common immigrant experience. Many immigrants have changed their names and took other measures in order to fit in with the majority culture in their adopted countries. Observant Jews tended to maintain their names and cultural identities, but there were individuals in the Jewish community who sought greater acceptance for economic or professional reasons. I have known people who have made these changes. This aspect of Mrs. Browning made her a familiar figure for me.

Ashley says

Rating: 2.5

In a nutshell: Mary Browning, who flew during World War II, decides it is time to stop hiding from her past and enlists the help of Elyse, a teenager that stumbles into Mary's writing group for the elderly to write Mary's memoir.

Recommendation: If you're really into well-written, historical fiction with some mumbo-jumbo about the mechanisms of old planes and about women fighting for their rights, then this is the book for you. I'd say it's a mixed bag for me personally.

I received this book as a gift from a friend, an uncorrected proof that is not for sale, if I may add! So I feel I must be completely honest with this review, as it is really interesting to be given this opportunity to review a book that is at this stage. But I'll be gentle, because I DID enjoy the writing style, character development,

and parts of the plot. But the whole point about it being about Mary's fascination with flying was lost on me.

"Don't write because you want to be a writer. Write because you have something to say."

Mary, now an 87-year-old widow, decides it is time to write her memoir... especially since she runs a writing group. The problem, however, is that she feels incapable of doing it herself. She enlists the help of a young girl who is more tech-savvy and can put Mary's thoughts into formulated chapters of Mary's experience flying during WWII. It is clear, however, that Mary is hiding something. She avoids social conversations with her fellow writers from her group because she doesn't want them delving into her past, as she is estranged from her family for reasons she is ashamed of. Meanwhile, Elyse finds time to write amidst chaos within her family as her parents argue and her grandmother is ill and far from reach. Changing time periods and character perspectives throughout the novel make this an interesting and decent read.

The writing style is impressive for this novel, because when I opened the book I didn't know what to expect. It was both descriptive and simple where it needed to be. The parts that were written about the planes, however, were lost on me because I know nothing about planes and quite frankly don't really care. I thought the plot could have been a bit more simple as well because it seemed to be as if the author just tried to put too much into the book. For instance, I understand that Elyse wants to be a writer herself but there isn't really any point to the scenes where she describes her idea for her own book. Maybe it was put in for more character development? who knows.

I did love the character development of the book as well. Mary is very complex with an interesting backstory. The way she comes to be estranged from her family could be an entire book in itself. She is an American-Jew that is inclined to become involved in the war, particularly to fly. I do wish it was explained a bit more where exactly the fascination to fly stems from... it is sort of explained, but in my mind I wouldn't be inclined to learn how to fly in WWII because of it. I also wished it would have gone into more detail about her friendships she made through the process because those were strong for me; I could have done without the entire romance aspect of it, although it is essential for a very important aspect of the plot as to how she became estranged from her family. I also like Elyse as a character, although again I found her romance interest pointless to the plot of the novel.

This is also an interesting book for women interested in reading books about women's rights throughout history, as women were discouraged from flying and it took a long time for women to even be accepted to enlist to fly in the war. I do not know if it's true that men actually sabotaged the planes the women flew, but nonetheless it is an interesting concept to consider. When the women went out in public they would lie about what they did because at the time, women were discouraged from working in general.

The reason I am giving this book 2,5 stars though, regardless of all the good things I've said, stems down to the plot. I lost interest during parts of the book and the plot essentially became much too convoluted and overwhelming for me. The author created these two main characters that in my mind each could have had their own books because too much was happening at once for both of them. Personally, I think the chapters should have focused exclusively on Mary, especially since her chapters flipped from past to present day, and then the book threw in Elyse's chapters in there. In addition to Mary's already interesting story line, the book has Elyse's as well, which is really complex. She's got her family problems in addition to her teenage angst and strong desire to be a writer. I feel like this author tried to accomplish too much in such a short book.

(view spoiler)

Stephanie Anze says

Mary Browning (a former pilot and author) runs a writing group, whose members are elderly. On one of their sessions, they get a new member, fifteen-year-old Elyse. An aspiring author, Elyse seeks advice and soon Mary herself is on hand to provide it. As both women grow closer together, they form a friendship. It soon becomes evident that they rely on each other to find their own voice.

This novel talks about women pilots and the works they did during WWII. Filling in for the men, who were fighting overseas, women took over the tasks typically assigned to them on the home front. They faced the same dangers but received none of the recognition. Mary Browning, one of the protagonists, is based on one of these pilots. In her group, she never shared her story but was encouraged to do it upon meeting Elyse. Told in tandem by Mary and Elyse, this novel also talks about identity and decisions made in the past that still haunt us. While I agree that the novel is, indeed, well written there are some issues. I found that certain plot elements to be somewhat unbelievable and some portions being tied up too neat. Having said that, I did enjoy reading the novel and found the historical aspect enlightening. Without a doubt, the focus of the story is the friendship between Elyse and Mary, which was heartwarming. A nice read overall.

Ronnie says

I loved this book! Sad, yet sweet.

Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says

THE SECRETS OF FLIGHT is filled with writers, readers, secrets, life's lessons, and? laugh-out-loud situations.?

We meet 87-year-old Mrs. Browning also known as Miriam Lichtenstein who has a story that needs to be told and Elyse a 15-year old who helps record her story.

We learn about Mrs Browning's past through flashbacks and the story she has Elyse typing for her.

The two main characters were lovable and two people who would be wonderful to know. I am wondering if the characters were actual people in the author's life.

I enjoyed flashing back to Mrs. Brownings' life and seeing her excitement and experiences with flying as well as her personal life. I learned about The Fly Girls who were famous during WWII.

The friendship between Elyse and Mrs. Browning beautifully wove the story.

THE SECRETS OF FLIGHT is a well-researched, marvelous debut filled with vivid descriptions.

THE SECRETS OF FLIGHT took a few pages to get the gist of the story line, but it was funny, endearing, and a must read for historical fiction and women's fiction fans.

I enjoyed THE SECRETS OF FLIGHT and was anxious to get back to the book and to the characters.

ENJOY when you read the book. I did. 4/5

This book was given to me free of charge and without compensation by the author and publisher in return for an honest review.

N. says

There's a twist in this book that felt a little too convenient but it made for the most beautiful, uplifting ending. I loved the relationship between Mary and Elyse, loved the honesty of their frustrations (so true to life), loved learning the history of the WASPs and adored the way Mary's friends rallied around her when she really needed them. Lovely story.

Penny (Literary Hoarders) says

I fairly ripped through this one in just a few short days! (I know it's showing a month here, but I just put that into my queue so that it would ensure it was the next one I read.) Thank you so very much to the author for sending this one to me, I'm sorry it took me so long to read it - definitely poor judgement on my part for letting other ones get in before this one. This is a wonderful story! Fantastic and entirely real and wholly developed characters. I recommend for sure.

Tara Chevestt says

Absolutely amazing novel. It made me laugh, cry, nod my head in agreement, and contemplate some of the complicated choices some are presented with in life. What do you choose? The family you were born to or the family you choose? Making your dreams come true or helping someone else obtain theirs? Is denying your religion denying yourself?

I've read many WASP novels and while there was nothing new to me about this part of the story, the Jewish heroine and her conflicts made it interesting. The modern tale was surprisingly the best part though, as all these past conflicts come to a head and a 15-year-old girl suddenly becomes an adult. She has her own conflicts. Be accepted or keep her dignity? Her parents are divorcing.

There are many lessons to be learned in this fantastic, heart-wrenching novel. This one will stay with me a long time.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

4.5 stars. "The Secrets of Flight" is the story of two people, Mary and Elyse. Mary is almost 90 and is looking back at her life and trying to come to terms with the secrets she has been hiding. Elyse is 15 and is going through a lot as her world is upended when her family breaks apart. These two characters have very

different backgrounds that come together in some really surprising ways in this book. This book is one where I was torn between turning the pages faster and savoring each page for a little bit longer.

With many historical fiction books that have narratives in different time periods, I am usually drawn to the one set in the past. While I really, really liked the past narrative (I'll get to that in a second), the present narrative where Mary and Elyse come together is great. I loved seeing how they unraveled Mary's past. This aspect kept me turning the pages. I loved the past narrative as well. Mary secretly learns to fly planes without most of her family knowing. It's World War II and not becoming for a woman to do something that is usually done by men. Although I have no aspirations to fly, my husband got his pilot's license last year and I saw a lot of the same excitement and daring and want for adventure between him and Mary, which made her character feel very true to me.

The historical detail in the book is very good. I loved how the author described Mary's life and her family, especially her dear sister Sarah. These are characters that I will be thinking about for a very long time. If you are looking for a historical fiction filled with vivid characters, daring, and adventure, this would be a great pick!

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I listened to the audio version and it was nice. And nice is pretty much my thought about the book. The Secrets of Flight is about Mary Browning, an old woman that retells her life's story to a young girl, Elyse Strickler. And through this do, we learn about her big secret while we also learn more about Elyse and her family and all their problems.

I wish I could have connected more with the characters. I found Mary's story interesting, her Jewish upbringing, her love for flying and the secret she has hidden all these years. However, as much as I enjoyed Elyse's story did I feel that her story took away the spotlight from Mary's story which was far more interesting. Not to mention the over the top "Hollywood" ending. I mean come on? Way too cheesy!

The book's best part is definitely Mary's story and I would have loved this book way more if her youth as a fly girl together with the other women would have taken center stage. The discrimination, the friendship and the losses. It would have been great to have learned more about the other women, their lives after they went their separate ways. I did enjoy Elyse story, but it almost felt like reading another book when the story focused on her.

I want to thank William Morrow Paperbacks for providing me with a free copy through Edelweiss for an honest review!
