



Lunch with Charlotte

Leon Berger

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Born in Vienna just after World War I, Charlotte survived the Nazi invasion, escaping on the Kindertransport to England and then to Canada.

Every Friday for the last 25 years of her life, I had lunch with Charlotte and each week she told me more of her extraordinary story. To all appearances, she was a strong and dignified survivor, with old-world courtesies, a twinkling sense of humor and a lilting Austrian syntax. Yet deep within, she'd been scarred by a profound personal trauma.

Finally, just before she died at the age of 91, she chose to entrust me with this dark secret and all at once I understood how it had affected her entire adult life. This is not just the true story of a remarkable woman and our extraordinary friendship but also an epic saga set against the backdrop of history.

A PORTION OF THE PROCEEDS FROM EACH SALE OF THIS BOOK WILL BE DONATED TO THE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM OF HOUSTON.

Lunch with Charlotte Details

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Donna says

This was an excellent book, well written and an interesting, true story. I enjoy learning about history from the people who lived it.

I might note that Mr. Berger would not have known this story if he hadn't spent so much time over a period years with this senior citizen ... something we all need to remember. Time spent with others will be rewarded.

Kim says

This wonderfully well written memoir reads like a novel. Berger immediately drew me into the story. His work is a great tribute to his dear friend. Her life will ever be remembered, her fierce independence and determination inspires others. The turbulent history and horrific events of WWII are a stark warning of humankind's basest evils as well as our ability to rise above and not only survive, but thrive. Charlotte was an "ordinary" woman who lived an extraordinary life and I am glad I read her story.

Patti Fischetti says

A feast set before your eyes

A true story that reads like fiction. As I read I couldn't tell if it was true or just a good story became Leon Burger did such an exceptional job odds bringing Charlotte's story to life. Her life went from being an innocent child to a dutiful daughter to an immigrant to a loving wife. How can one woman live through all this history. It's an amazing read.

Jane says

did not like Charlotte.

Leandra Withers says

Well done! He is able to remove the mask and lay open the heart with compassion and trust. A well earned trust.

Abby Welker says

Although not as tragic and harrowing as other Holocaust stories, it's still touching and sad nonetheless. It's the true story of a young girl who experienced sad and confusing events in the prime of her girlhood. She managed to mask her pain throughout her life, but her tender feelings of heartache rested constantly beneath the surface. Every time I read a WWII story, I continue to be amazed at the far-reaching effects that one evil person has had, and continues to have, over decades of time. My heart is always touched, my gratitude deepens, and my resolve strengthens to never complain about what I think is hard in my life. I know nothing of hard. Loved this book - it's definitely worth reading.

Phyllis Eisenstadt says

SURVIVING WITH DIGNITY

When I first started reading this book I thought it would be merely another version of the infamous Holocaust story, but I was wrong. Actually, it focuses around the eponymous heroine, Charlotte--her life before, during, and after the Holocaust.

The narrator is a man who had become her friend and with whom she had lunch every Friday. She relates bits and pieces of her life at each meeting--events and thoughts she had never shared with anyone else. The author gradually builds upon her life story by calling upon her memories and mementos of her past during these lunches.

Although pathos prevails throughout the story, it is unlike other Holocaust stories in that constant, vivid images of violence do not assail the reader on every page. Instead, the author delves into the psychological effects of an earlier, profound trauma that Charlotte had experienced and which "had affected her for the rest of her existence."

Bravo to Leon Berger for giving the heroine the opportunity to unburden herself of all her unfortunate memories, which must have provided catharsis for her, and for always allowing her to maintain the dignity she so rightfully deserved.

Splendid book.

Phyllis Eisenstadt

Sharon says

I read this book after hearing and reading raving reviews so I may have expected something more and

therefore, I was a little disappointed. Every survivor's story is amazing and inspiring. However, some parts of this book just did not seem "real" to me. In particular, why did Charlotte come to Montreal in 1954? The book makes it seem that her father wanted her, at 30 years of age, to get on with her own life but I do not understand why she could not get on with her independent life in London. London has a large Jewish community and Charlotte could have been part of that and still been close to her father. I feel that something was left out of the book. Anyhow, all in all, I did enjoy reading it.

Rose-Billie Canter says

My several days with Charlotte and Leon

The description of this book from Amazon appealed to me because as the daughter of an immigrant mother with whom I frequently discussed her experiences. Fortunately my grandfather left Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution (1905), went to Austria where he met and married my grandmother and where my mother was born, decided to come alone to the United States to make enough to bring his wife and daughter here. Unfortunately for Charlotte, her parents stayed.

This book is so moving because it is so real. There was no sugar-coating to any of the events, and the reader enters the story with the author. Without any question, "Lunch with Charlotte" was one of the best books I've read this year, and I thank Leon Berger and Grey Gecko Press for sharing Charlotte's story. Please keep writing Mr. Berger!

Nancy says

This book tells the story of Charlotte and her family, starting before World War II. It tells how the Jewish people were treated and hated leading up to the war. The Jews slowly had their rights taken away from them. Charlotte was a friend of the author's for many years, and finally Charlotte started to open up to him, about her past. Charlotte's father was living in England, while his wife and daughter remained in Vienna. He learned there was going to be a train of Jewish children, taken out of Vienna, but Charlotte was too old. Her mother was told to lie about her daughter's age, and Charlotte was able to escape to England. I had a hard time getting into this book, but the second half went by quickly.

DonnaJo Jo Pallini says

This is a beautiful and sweet memoir of a lady who persevered through WW II in occupied Austria. The author, who was a friend of Charlotte, shares her heartbreaks and triumphs because he believes her story must be told. I agree with him.

Bethany says

I wavered between three and four stars for this book, but, in the end, three won out. I enjoyed the book: however, for me, it was missing something. Perhaps, it felt too "third person". I'm not sure I can pinpoint

exactly what I felt was missing. I realize that Charlotte would never have written the same memoir, particularly because she would have left out her most traumatic experience, which affected the rest of her life. For this reason, I'm glad the author told her story. The book had a different twist to the Holocaust survival story, and parts, particularly the scene at Vienna's train station were gut-wrenching. While this wasn't my favorite Holocaust-related book, I recommend it to others on the belief that those who died or were forever changed as a result of the Holocaust should not be forgotten.

Thom Swennes says

“A good spirit helps generate a good fortune.”

I have always been interested in my past. Where did I come from? I, as I’m sure many of you have a list of names that trace my roots back generations. These, however, are just names and maybe when they were born, christened, married, and eventually died. These facts say little if nothing about who they were. What did they do, and what did they think and believe? The humanization of these ancestors is sorely lacking. To see and experience the mundane and frenetic activities of your early ancestors would give you another perspective of your own life and existence.

Charlotte Urban, nee Liselotte Goldberger, was born in Vienna in 1919 of middle-class Jewish parents. Neither one of the parents, or indeed their parents was particularly religious but did follow many of the customs. Her father served, as millions of others, served in the Great War and thankfully came home, relatively unscathed when Charlotte was born. The aftermath of the war, great depression and the political turmoil in an increasingly volatile Germany, were all part of her early life.

This is a true story. Years later the author, Leon Berger, was blessed with the friendship and trust of a remarkable woman; with an even more remarkable story. In this book, he has humanized her story and given a personal glance into the past. I found myself not only liking but loving most of the characters. Although from another generation, I could empathize and well sympathize with her and all of those close to her. You are not what you think, or what you believe. You are not what you do or where you live. You are a product of your ancestors and in many ways, they influence what you now are; even if you have no idea who they were. This is a saga spanning three generations through a century of political and economical turmoil, religious and social upheaval, and personal and family grief. Everyone met and with every goodbye, the people add and form a part of everyone they touch. I really liked this glimpse into the lives of since hitherto strangers that I now regard as friends. The vagaries of their lives are sure to interest many readers,

Sunil Parray says

Poignant and beautiful.

Judie says

Charlotte Urban, born Lisolette Goldberger in Vienna in 1919, faced her adolescence as a Jew in Austria as Hitler and the Nazi party gained influence. She was an only child and her father traveled a great deal because of work requirements leaving her mother to care for her.

As the war closed in, her father tried to get her mother to leave, but her mother, not wanting to leave her parents, friends, and the only home she had ever known, refused.. Eventually the borders closed and her father was caught on one side, she and her mother on the other.

Leon Berger met Charlotte in Montreal and lunched with her every Friday. During those visits, she told him about her parents, their life in Austria, the Nazi take over, and what happened to her and her family before, during and after the war. While she was never arrested and taken to a concentration camp, she told him about what happened to the people who were transported there.

Eventually she told him about a major event involving her mother that influenced her own life and how she viewed her relationship with her mother from that point onward. She had never told anyone else about that event but telling it helped her understand more about herself and her parents.

At the end of each chapter, Berger analyzes the particular visit.

The story of one woman, it book was well-written. However, there were a couple discrepancies: Why would someone named “Hugo Kohn” be identified as not being Jewish.

The book refers to “Jeannette Altwegg, the reigning British and world champion” without stating in what sport she was the champion.

It mentions that “she now had sufficient funds to obtain the health care she needed.” She was living in Canada which has universal health care. What was the problem?

Interesting observations:

“Her father told her that running away like a rabbit was an acceptable strategy and that the huge rabbit population was a testimony to how well it worked.”

Lisolette’s family was not religious. Regarding his religious practices (“Why should I join a synagogue if I can talk to [God] in my kitchen if I want?” a rebbe told her father, “It’s the synagogues and yeshivas which maintain the faith, which keep us together as a community.” “No,...,it’s the rest of the world that does that.

The persecute all Jews whatever our personal beliefs and that’s why we stick together.” “All the prayer and devotion in the universe hadn’t saved the Hasidim, who were being sent to the camps just like everyone else.”

This book was a free Amazon download.
