



# **Crossing the Borders of Time: A True Story of War, Exile, and Love Reclaimed**

*Leslie Maitland*

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## **Crossing the Borders of Time: A True Story of War, Exile, and Love Reclaimed** Leslie Maitland

Leslie Maitland is an award-winning former *New York Times* investigative reporter whose mother and grandparents fled Germany in 1938 for France, where, as Jews, they spent four years as refugees, the last two under risk of Nazi deportation. In 1942 they made it onto the last boat to escape France before the Germans sealed its harbors. Then, barred from entering the United States, they lived in Cuba for almost two years before emigrating to New York. This sweeping account of one family's escape from the turmoil of war-torn Europe hangs upon the intimate and deeply personal story of Maitland's mother's passionate romance with a Catholic Frenchman. Separated by war and her family's disapproval, the young lovers—Janine and Roland—lose each other for fifty years. It is a testimony to both Maitland's investigative skills and her devotion to her mother that she successfully traced the lost Roland and was able to reunite him with Janine. Unlike so many stories of love during wartime, theirs has a happy ending.

## **Crossing the Borders of Time: A True Story of War, Exile, and Love Reclaimed Details**

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## **From Reader Review Crossing the Borders of Time: A True Story of War, Exile, and Love Reclaimed for online ebook**

### **Bonnie\_blu says**

The book starts out strong, but goes downhill from there, and the climax of the book was infuriating. Roland and Janine were young lovers in Alsace at the beginning of the war, but were separated when her family had to flee because they were Jewish. The decades pass and each marries other people. Finally, Janine's adult daughter tracks down Roland and the two reconnect over the phone 50 years later. This could have been a wonderfully heartwarming story except for the fact that Roland is still married and he completely dismisses that fact and his wife's feelings (Janine's husband had died). He and Janine sneak around for years after their reunion with no regard for Roland's wife. I was sickened by the author trying to portray this sordid affair as something wonderful.

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### **Laura says**

Leslie Maitland's biography/memoir really operates on 2 levels. First, there's the story of the escape of the her mother and her mother's family from the oncoming Nazis, as they move first from Germany to France, and then escape France for Cuba and, eventually, the United States. The details of Jewish life under a Nazi regime are chilling. In escaping Janine, Maitland's mother, leaves behind a boyfriend whom she believes to be the love of her life. The second level of the story examines Janine's life as she tries to "replace" Roland (the boyfriend) with an American husband and children. The family dynamics are fascinating as well, as are Janine's (and Leslie's) attempts to resolve her emotional connection to this long-lost love. I found the book especially interesting because I was in Freiburg, Germany, and Alsace while I was reading it, so I had a geographic as well as an emotional connection to the story. Maitland is an excellent writer and her background as a reporter shines through in the detail of her historical reporting - she verifies the story told her by her mother and provides substantial supporting detail. This is a great read for those interested in the human side of World War II.

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### **Ann says**

Reading through the reviews on Goodreads, I am amazed that people focused on the immorality of marriage infidelity and spoke little about the horrific historical events this family survived. It may seem hard to believe but the Gunzberger family was one of the lucky ones. They had money and connections that allowed them to escape Nazi Germany when a full 90% of the Jews in Germany were killed by the Nazis.

I love that the family was able to preserve so many artifacts. Most of the Jews who survived lost everything. And Leslie's research was impeccable. Only a true story could be this fascinating as it talked about the compromises we all make in life. This is a true testament to the power of one family and the dreams they had.

Thank you, Leslie Maitland, for having the courage to share your family's incredible story.

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### **Jessica says**

After hearing this amazing love story from Leslie Maitland herself, it took me three years to finally pick up the book. It was beautifully written, and I could tell that it was one of the most important things that she's ever written. It's almost too good to be true, and I think that's what makes it appealing.

I had no idea the struggles in France during WWII, and that so many Jewish people were sent there, and then taken to their deaths. That was an amazing history lesson for me. I also learned that it wasn't uncommon to be Jewish in Germany, clearly a naive perspective of mine that needed to be corrected.

The love story is beautifully played out. I felt said for Janine for most of the novel, but thankfully she comes out alright in the end. What an amazing relationship these two must have had for it to all come together this way.

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### **Debbie says**

This book was brought to my attention by the NPR radio program where Diane Rehm interviewed the author, Leslie Maitland. After listening to her read an excerpt, I knew I had to read it. I am so glad that I did! This was a fantastic book!! While it is a true story, written by an investigative reporter for the NY Times, it reads like a well plotted novel. Janine, the main character is the author's mother. Her Jewish family left Germany for France in 1938 and subsequently escaped to the US via Cuba. In leaving, she had to part with the love of her life, Roland. That romance colored the remainder of her life in so many ways. So much so, that her children all knew the story and eventually, the daughter went to look for Roland to see what had become of him. There is such a rich wealth of actual documents and photos saved by Janine's father and also uncovered in archives, etc. that you really feel like you know these people, their places and their dilemmas. She brings all of them to life so well. I learned much about WW2 and France, Germany, Cuba that I'd never known despite having read many Holocaust stories, both true and fictional. I heartily recommend this book!!

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### **Bonnie says**

I really wanted to love this book - I mean a love story about a couple separated through war and reunited years (and marriages) later? Sounds amazing. Unfortunately, the writing just drove me bonkers. The story meandered all around and got lost in annoying details. I couldn't even hang on until it got to the good part. Too bad.

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### **Lauriann says**

The author, Leslie Maitland had me right from the start. She was in the verge of finding the love of her mother's life, a person her mother had been separated from fifty years ago when she fled Nazi Germany. The hook was in, and most of the remaining book was the background stories of her mother and grandparents'

lives and I had to be patient to see if her attempts to reunite "Janine" and "Roland" were successful. I was in awe of the amount of research that went into the writing of this book. It was rich with historical detail. That could have been cumbersome at times when I was anxious to get back to the love story, but the history was so reinforcing of the story. I listened to this book as an audio, but my name is on a waiting list at the library for the hardcover because I am hopeful there are pictures to go along with her story. That is the one downside of listening to bios and memoirs on audio.

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### **Elise Murdock says**

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 pried 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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### **Caitlin says**

I loved every moment I spent reading this book (which I did in about 4 days). Maitland's writing style was unlike any other I have ever encountered; part memoir, part investigative reporter, part narrative, part history, and part novel. Clearly Maitland has done exhaustive research, painstakingly verifying sources, names, places, and events.

The best part about this story is that it's true! I fell in love with the characters and when I wasn't reading, I found my mind wandering to Sigmar and Alice, Janine and Roland, cousin Mimi, and so many others. Now that I've finished the book, I still find myself thinking about the plight of this family. I probably learned more about WWII and the holocaust in "Crossing The Borders of Time" than I have learned in school. I think this was due to the fact that I, the reader, experienced the events as they happened on a personal level in the lives of these characters. Starting with derogatory comments, to discriminating taxes, the illegal confiscation of businesses and assets, and of course the atrocities of deportations to concentration camps. It's one thing to read the phrase "they lost everything" and quite another to read pages of the calculating and systematic stripping away of everything from the Jews in occupied Europe. It's hard to find the humanity in so many leaders and countries who could have done so much but instead did very little to stop the atrocities being committed by the Nazis. How could so many desperate pleas go unnoticed? Of course I am thankful that the Allies banded together to fight and I am even more thankful that so many young men were willing to give up

their lives. But for millions of men, women, and children who were Jewish or otherwise labeled as "undesirable", the intervention came far too late. So when I read about the plight of the Gunzberger family, I began to understand the desperate struggles of obtaining paperwork, and visas, and securing safe passage for their family. I can't help but feel that this family was more than lucky, it seemed as though Divine guidance was protecting them.

I won't even go into the incredibly beautiful love story of young Janine and Roland who were torn apart by war and who lost so much due to tragic circumstances much beyond their control. So much loss and sadness and years of heartache makes the consequences of war much more poignant and personal. But, the ending seems to make so much of that suffering melt away. I am inspired to believe that love can persevere through so much and I find my faith in my own marriage strengthened.

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### **Karen says**

Loved this book! What an incredible story. I'm still shocked and saddened by these stories of pain and loss during the time of Hitler and we should never forget what these jewish families had to endure. I recommend this book to anyone who loves to read about WWII.

I had the pleasure of meeting this author at Booktopia 2012 in Vermont. Thank you Ms. Maitland for sharing your mother's story.

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### **Catherine says**

I bought into the selling point that this book told the Romeo and Juliet-esque love story of two young lovers separated over decades due to Maitland's mother's family escaping persecution during the Holocaust. Well, yes, that's part of it, but a sizeable portion of the 500+ pages are devoted to dry historical information, taking away from the primary, more personal story. It's important information, and I usually do enjoy history, but the author threw in every little tidbit from her research and turned the book into a slog-fest.

Without giving away the ending, it was a huge disappointment. All along Maitland makes her two protagonists victims, and I agree with some of that, particularly when it came to actions by Janine's family to ensure the couple were kept separated. But the selfish, self-centered behavior of Roland and Hanna in their later years was inexcusable for me, especially after they had suffered so much due to their loved ones' unforgivable actions.

By the end, I felt a bit duped and a lot disappointed.

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### **Anne Brown says**

I was really excited to read this book based on some reviews but it got incredibly bogged down with a bit too much history and not enough of the real story. A big disappointment.

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### **Elaine says**

Part of this book is a remarkable story, remarkably told. I hovered between a 3 and 4 on this one, because Maitland's mother's story is truly interesting (the denouement is knowable from the jacket copy, but I won't spoil). And the chapters about Janine (the mother's) years as a girl in early Nazi Germany, as a relatively comfortable refugee in pre-war France, and as an evermore precarious potential target in occupied France are wonderful.

Maitland's grandfather preserved numerous family documents, and this collection, along with Maitland's painstaking research and what were clearly her mother's very vivid memories make these chapters fascinating. And like Daniel Mendelsohn in *The Lost: In Search of Six of Six Million*, Maitland doggedly goes to each of the places that her family's flight from the Holocaust played out, speaking to neighbors, helpers, and even those who collaborated (some of the book's most compelling episodes involve Maitland's visits to her ancestral city in Germany, and her complex relationship to the family took over the house where her mother grew up and others, including the family that grew rich from her grandfather's expropriated business).

This search, this personal investigation, reminded me very strongly of *The Lost*, one of the best books on the Holocaust that I have ever read.

But this is not the *Lost* - for a few reasons, despite Maitland's admirable reportorial skills it falls short of that standard as a book. First, Maitland is simply not as good a writer as Mendelsohn. A reporter by trade, her prose becomes a bit clunky when she dives into the emotional or the romantic.

Second, the dramatic love story that she has to tell - and it is dramatic - is not as interesting, really, as what happens to her family and their friends, and their helpers - especially because Maitland's research and reporting is so good. You want to know more about the landscape of life in Occupied France, and less about what is at bottom an adolescent love affair (and we all had those!).

Third, I felt that book bogged down in the post-war years in America, and in the telling of her parents' suburban life and infidelities. It's tough going for a daughter, I'm sure, to write about her parents (especially her father, since she clearly had a special closeness with her mother, and took her side), but Maitland herself seems both uncomfortable in the telling yet determined to give us all the detail. This long suburban stretch cannot be as compelling as what came before, particularly as Maitland (as noted) is better at intense reporting than at introspection and emotion. The book slows down quite a bit.

So a 3 or a 4? The limitations of stars! It's an amazing story, meticulously researched, and the first half of the book is an important contribution to Holocaust/WWII non-fiction. Like Mendelsohn, Maitland did her research at almost the last possible moment - she can still meet many of the people who knew her family (for better or worse in Europe), but already today that wouldn't be possible. But the book also has its limitations...

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### **Chrissie says**

ETA: I would like to discuss this book with others who have read it. Please see message four below.

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I cannot say I liked the ending, but hey this is not fiction! I would recommend this book to those interested in WW2 memoirs and those who do not get upset when they read about infidelity! I would avoid the audiobook narrated by the author. The melodramatic tone piled on top of emotional, melodramatic lines is sometimes hard to swallow. If this sounds like I did not like this book, then you have misunderstood me! The war experiences of Jews living on the border between France and Germany is very well depicted. The émigrés' life in Cuba and what happened after the war was interesting too. I very much liked the description of the different places where the family lived and travelled. While I found the history of this family interesting, I am not at all sure the author has correctly interpreted the ins and outs of the love story. In relation to the ending, the decisions made brought sorrow to others, and this is simply disregarded.....

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In chapter 24:

I am fascinated with this strange family. All families are strange except those you know nothing about..... My prime question remains how the mother's previous love affair can be so exalted. For me it was always imagined, better than it ever really was. Then the author's father enters the scene. The first ten years of the marriage was fine, but then.....he makes no attempt to curb his infidelity. She counters with the stories of her previous love affair. I am mentioning this because if you cannot stomach a book that has as one of its central themes adultery, I would advise you to look elsewhere. I find it interesting. What has happened in this family to lead these individuals to behave as they do? Are people born with a particular character? Is it that the mother and father together created this problem? The father seemed to never be able to live up to the magnificence of his wife's earlier star-crossed love affair! Who could? And yet he was a flirter from the moment they met! We all know people who have had extramarital love affairs. An understanding of why and how this happens is another theme of this book. My opinion? After the war, people wanted to enjoy life; they set their goals and went after them a little bit regardless of the consequences their actions would have on others. Competitiveness was the name of the game. I recognize all this from my youth, growing up in NY in the fifties. The book is interesting.

I have stated that the author both narrates and composes her lines melodramatically. Here is an excerpt so you can judge if you react as I do. She has gone back to the birthplace of her mother, Freiburg, Germany. She is returning for two reasons: to better understand her familial past and to write about the reconciliation of the Jews in Germany after the war.

*At night, inside the brooding, lonely confines of my dark hotel room in the town's historic center, my narrow bed became an oar-less raft on which I lay awake, unmoored, tossed through space and time. I fought against the undertow of two terrifying waves..... (chapter 24)*

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Crossing the Borders of Time: A True Love Story of War, Exile, and Love Reclaimed is till engaging me. There are two primary topics: a Jewish holocaust story and a love relationship. The author narrates the book herself and this is to detriment of the story. Her German is fine, at least to my ears, but the French leaves something to be desired. Her voice along with the melodrama of some of the lines is really soap-operatic. And she slurs words occasionally so they become indecipherable.

I don't buy the daughter's, i.e. the author's, analysis of her mother's relationship with a previous suitor. The author draws this as a wonderful, glorious love story. For me, this love relationship is pitiful and an excuse for the author's mother's inability to become independent of her own parents. Absentee lovers are often idealized; the mother does this in spades. I keep screaming at her to open her eyes and look at Roland (the suitor) clearly. But she doesn't seem to hear me..... Her brother warned her and she wouldn't listen to him either. I am wondering if this love affair should have been kept private. Should such a family relationship be dredged up and turned into a WW2 holocaust memoir? Let me explain: the mother loves Roland, never marries him, but instead chooses another, an American, after she immigrates to the States. Then for the rest of her life she pines for Roland. When her American husband dies, the daughter/author brings the Roland and her mother together again. This is not a spoiler it is stated at the start of the book.

I did like the historical facts related to the family's WW2 experiences in Alsace, Unoccupied France and Germany. Cuba too! They are forced to spend years in Cuba before being allowed to enter the States. When I am reading these bits I actually love the book! Interesting facts and perceptive analyses of French and Cuban war decisions are related.

I have at least 1/3 left of the book. Now I fear I will be drowned in the melodramatic, selfish and self-pitying behavior of the love-stared mother. She is always blaming others or inconvenient circumstances for her own actions. OR is it in fact the daughter, the author of this book, who has misconstrued the past, her mother's behavior and motivations?

Writing this helped me let off a little steam. I bet this will end up with three stars. There are good things and bad things in this book.

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### **Chris says**

It was a struggle. I was lured in by the whole 'reunion after 50 years' thing, but it felt like it took me 50 years to get to that part. First I had to read the entire history of WWII in France (shades of history class which was never my favourite) and then years in Cuba and the US.

Finally the big reunion -- which might have been a lot more touching if (a)the author's father hadn't been at home dying while she's trying to find mom's lost love, and (b) lost love has a wife. From then on, it was really somewhat sleazy, with details about mom and lost love at last consummating their passion (please! I'm as old as the mom, and I certainly wouldn't want my daughter writing about it!!) and carrying on behind the wife's back for years, even including the grandchildren in the secret love affair.

Not recommending this one.

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