How did Lynne Golodner evoke such a pitch-perfect Scottish-American love story in ‘Cave of Secrets’?

readthespirit.com/explore/how-did-lynne-golodner-evoke-such-a-pitch-perfect-scottish-american-love-story-in-cave-of-secrets

Lynne Meredith Golodner

September 1, 2024

Yes, ***THAT'S!*** how much Lynne loved her sojourn in Scotland. (Photo used with her permission.)

> ***EDITOR's NOTE:*** *With deep family roots in Scotland, I am highly recommending what I'm calling Lynne Golodner's "pitch-perfect" novel Cave of Secrets over on my Goodreads homepage, where I regularly post my book reviews. I have known and respected Lynne's career as a journalist and media professional for decades now, but was astonished—to be honest—at how well she captured what I think of as "our family homeland." How did she do that? And that's the question I asked Lynne to answer that question in the following ReadTheSpirit column.*
> ***—David Crumm, Editor of ReadTheSpirit magazine***

By LYNNE GOLODNER

I went to the Highlands of Scotland in the summer of 2022 because I had a romantic notion about living in another country for a length of time so that I grew to know its roads and felt comfortable shopping in its groceries. But I also went to write. I called it a writing sabbatical and gave myself a month in a charming house in the town of Tomatin, but I didn't have a specific project I was ready to write.

I first got the idea for the novel that would become *Cave of Secrets* that summer, when I wrote at the kitchen table with the iron stove ablaze to warm the house in the cool morning hours. I played Scottish music, drank copious cups of milky tea and wrote for hours before heading off to hike Highland hills or meet with writers in the little towns of the Cairngorms or in the old buildings of Inverness.

That's where I discovered Asher Asher, Hannah de Rothschild and Archibald Primrose Earl of Rosebery. These were the very real historical figures I stumbled upon online who became the inspiration for my second novel.

Asher Asher was the first Scottish Jew to enter the medical profession. In England, until 1872, there were religious tests to gain access to universities, so anyone who was not Christian did not gain admittance. There were no such laws in Scotland.

Born in Glasgow in 1837, Asher studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh and in 1856, he became Scotland's first Jewish doctor.

The Primrose family traces back to 1490; their ancestral land is known as the Dalmeny estate and it sits by the banks of River Forth in West Edinburgh. Archibald Philip, the 5th Earl of Rosebery, is the best-known member of this aristocratic family.

He married Hannah de Rothschild and had an active political career. In fact, he changed the face of British election campaigning by applying American techniques of "electioneering" through mass meetings, parades and building excitement among voters. He served as Prime Minister of England for just one year, 1894-1895. It was Rosebery who coined the term the "British Commonwealth of Nations."

His wife, Hannah de Rothschild, became the richest woman in Britain at the age of 25, when she inherited her father's estate. The Rothschilds were from Frankfurt with documented family history dating to the 16th century. Hannah was incredibly philanthropic throughout her life, though she died young, at age 39, of typhoid fever compounded by kidney disease.

I initially set out to write a historical novel based on these real people, but I don't write historical novels. I write contemporary fiction with romance and suspense and Jewish identity in at least some of the characters. In *Cave of Secrets*, several secondary characters were inspired by these people, and the story itself takes place in modern times, mostly in Scotland but also a little bit in Michigan.

When I had a draft finished and was deep into revisions, I returned to Scotland to scout out the locations that appear prominently in the book. While I traveled widely through the Highlands and Islands of northern Scotland in the summer of 2022, the book is set near Loch Lomond and also in Edinburgh. So in 2023, I went to both of those places, sat by the shore of the loch, walked the streets of Edinburgh, and took copious notes to make the settings and the scenes more authentic.

I deliberately focus my author brand on writing books that present characters with Jewish identity. Where my first novel, *Woman of Valor*, focused on an Orthodox protagonist, *Cave of Secrets* does not include main characters who are religious. That was important because I want my characters to confront and ponder who they are and who they want to be—including how they want Jewish ancestry or heritage to inform their present-day sense of self.

We have Eve, a young woman raised by a single father who quits a journalism job for an archival fellowship in Scotland. There, she meets Mac, who manages an inn and pub that is part of his aristocratic family's estate. He wants to be an ordinary guy, which irks his mother, Margaret. She's a third main character in this story, and, coming from a poor childhood, she's struggling to accept her status by marriage. Finally, we have Eve's father, Sam, who fled an oppressive religious upbringing so he could live freely and openly as a gay man.

All of these characters are grappling with who they are and who they want to be. They are on a journey toward self-acceptance as the first step toward finding true love.

Setting a book about Jewish identity in Scotland is an unusual choice, to be sure. Wherever I go, I look for the writers and I look for the Jews, and I always find both.

In Scotland, the Jewish community is small, but strongly identifying. The first documentation of Jews in Scotland is from 1290, when Jews were expelled from England. But the first organized Jewish community in Edinburgh was not established until 1816.

Today, there are two synagogues in Edinburgh, and the University of Edinburgh has a Jewish society. Glasgow is home to six synagogues and the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre.

Though there were some 20,000 Jews in Scotland in the 1930s, today they number less than 6,000, mostly in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

I wish I could say that I have a bit of Scottish heritage in my DNA. So in love with that gorgeous nation, I did an Ancestry test, which came back as 98% Jewish mainly focused on Eastern Europe and Russia. The remaining 2% is split between Sweden & Denmark and the Baltics. I want to believe it's Viking blood, which migrated to Scotland.

I had so much fun writing this story, creating characters who love the land and are finding ways to love others and themselves. Romance factors highly in my novels because at the end of the day, everyone wants to be loved. But love of self is so important and really, must be the foundation before any person can find a true and lasting love with another. That's a theme in *Cave of Secrets*—and probably in all of my books!

Site Design Copyright © 2024 David Crumm Media, LLC