

Long Island Reads 2012 Reader's Guide



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LONG ISLAND READS

About Long Island Reads

One Island, One Book



One Book projects are community-wide reading programs. The first **One Book** project was initiated by the Washington Center for the Book in 1998. Since then, the concept has spread across the United States and around the world. Seattle librarian, Nancy Pearl, author of *Book Lust* and *More Book Lust*, and NPR book critic, is the mastermind behind the **One City, One Book** phenomenon. If your city is interested in starting its own program, you can obtain “How To” information by going to Seattle Reads (www.spl.org).

To see a listing of **One City, One Book** projects visit the Library of Congress website at www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/one-book.html. Projects are listed by state, city and author. While at the Library of Congress site, check out their Center for the Book.

Other sites of interest include:

All America Reads www.allamericareads.org

The Big Read-National Endowment for the Arts www.artsmidwest.org

The **Long Island Reads** Committee is a group of librarians and library employees from Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island, New York who volunteer to work on this Island-wide reading initiative. Each spring people in Nassau and Suffolk read the same book, participate in discussions of the selection, and enjoy related events in public libraries.

Many events take place during

National Library Week, April 8-14, 2012.

For more information about Long Island Reads

One Island, One Book visit:

www.longislandreads.org

About Alyson Richman

Biographical and Professional Information



Alyson Richman grew up in St. James and attended public school there until the sixth grade. She said, “I wrote a 20-page story when I was in second grade and promptly informed my parents I had completed my first novel.” She remembers that her story seemed long at the time, “Now, it’s hardly a first chapter.” At Harbor Country Day School her sixth grade teacher was the first person to encourage her to become a writer. “I’ll forever be indebted to him,” says Richman. “He put the seed in my head that being a writer was even possible.”

Richman is a graduate of Wellesley College and a former Thomas J. Watson Fellow. She currently lives with her husband and two children in Huntington Bay on Long Island, New York.

The Lost Wife, a national bestseller, is Richman’s fourth novel. She is also the author of *The Mask Carver’s Son*, *Swedish Tango*, and *The Last Van Gogh*. Her novels are currently published in more than ten languages and have received both national and international critical acclaim. *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and many other national print outlets have reviewed her books favorably.

The Last Van Gogh was nominated as a Book Sense Notable Pick in 2006.

Richman has appeared on both national television and radio syndicates promoting her work.



Plot Synopsis

Alyson Richman's fourth novel, *The Lost Wife* begins with the reunion of a couple who, each thinking the other had died in the Holocaust, have not seen each other for sixty years. Richman imagines the sixty years of separation between these two.

Josef Kohn is a successful New York obstetrician who still dreams of his first wife, Lenka, an art student he left behind in Czechoslovakia while fleeing the Nazis. Lenka, who he believes died during the war, continues to haunt his dreams, while his second wife, Amalia, remains more of a ghost to him than is Lenka. As we follow Lenka's journey to the ghetto of Terezin, where she is forced to draft technical drawings for the Germans and is a witness to the secret paintings of an underground group of artists involved in their own form of resistance against their captors, we see not only the endurance of the human spirit, but also of the artist, whose desire to create and document, cannot be extinguished.

From the glamorous ease of pre-War Prague, to the ensuing horror of Nazi Europe, we witness both the dawning of Lenka's and Josef's love affair to its tragic unraveling. Each character must forge their own path for survival and each must struggle to adapt to post-war America, while their secrets, their past, and the ghost of their first marriage, are known only to them. *The Lost Wife* is a story that explores the depth — the power — of first love, the resilience of the human spirit, and our capacity to remember.

Interviews and Reviews

An excerpt from Sunday Profile: Alyson Richman, an interview with *Huntington Patch* reporter Sasha Abraham (8/14/11). For the full article, visit <http://huntington.patch.com/articles/sunday-profile-alyson-richman>.

SA: How did you come to write *The Lost Wife*?

AR: I was hoping to write a book about an artist during World War II who was somehow touched by the Holocaust, but I didn't know how I was going to frame the novel. Then one day I was getting my hair cut in a local salon right here in Huntington, and overheard the stylist telling a story about a client who attended a wedding where the bride's grandmother and groom's grandfather had not previously met. The grandfather was convinced he knew the grandmother from somewhere, and finally asked her to roll up her sleeve, which revealed a six-number tattoo from Auschwitz. He studied her face and then said, "You were my wife." I had my answer — and it had its first seeds of germination right here in Huntington!

SA: Do you have a certain environment that you like to work in?

AR: It's ironic, I have a house on the water with a beautiful view, yet my desk faces the wall, because I don't want to be distracted. So I have a small little room that has no view that I work in, very little clutter, and I don't have internet in the room.

SA: Who are your favorite authors?

AR: I love Gabriela Garcia Marquez, Cynthia Ozick, Geraldine Brooks. I loved "Reliable Wife." I also really loved "A Glass Room" by Simon Mawer.

SA: What's next for you?

AR: I've already started researching my next book which will take place in Italy. I always come up with the idea for my next book right before I finish one!



Interviews and Reviews

An excerpt from Q&A with best-selling author John Lescroart. For the full article, visit the author's website <http://alysonrichman.com/category/interviews>.

JL: Say a few words about your extraordinary prologue to this book and how it initiated the creative process of the novel.

AR: I had been hoping to write a novel where I could explore an artist's experience during WWII and the Holocaust. So I started to do research about how certain real life artists were still able to create, even under these horrific and dangerous circumstances. But I didn't know how I was going to frame the novel. Then one day I was getting my hair cut at a local salon, and I overheard the stylist next to me telling a story he had recently heard from another client. It was about a woman who had recently attended a wedding where the bride's grandmother and the groom's grandfather had not met previously. At the rehearsal dinner the night before, the groom's grandfather insisted he knew the bride's grandmother "from somewhere." At the end of the evening, still convinced that he recognized her (despite her denials), he asked her to roll up her sleeve. There the six-number tattoo from Auschwitz was inked into her skin. He looked at her again, this time more closely. Studying her face one more time, he said: "You were my wife."

When I heard that story, I knew I had the beginning of my novel! I would begin and end it at the wedding scene, but invent this couple's journey in between: how they fell in love in romantic pre-war Prague, but then became separated as the Germans invaded, and later how they each begin new lives in America. I made Lenka — the "lost wife" of the book's title — a young art student at the beginning of the war, so I could weave in my historical research about various artists who had survived Terezin and Auschwitz by using their artistic skills. It was my hope that my readers would learn and appreciate the history of these artists, while also becoming swept away into Josef and Lenka's love story that I created.

JL: I have rarely come across a novel where the visual arts have played such an important role, in both the personal and political realm. What is your own background, if any, in visual art? To what extent did your creation of Lenka the artist help you deal with the themes in the book?

AR: I am the daughter of an abstract oil painter and a painter myself. I actually went to college thinking I was going to major in studio art, but then fell in love with art history. What I love about it was uncovering the story within the painting. My mother taught me, early on in my childhood, the "gift of seeing." If you're going to paint, you need to look at the clues of your subject, the traces of life — whether it's the bruise on a pear or a wrinkle on a face. I try to bring that to my writing and to also incorporate texture and color into my words, so that the reader has a full, sensory experience.

Interviews and Reviews

An excerpt from Q&A with best-selling author John Lescroart. For the full article, visit the author's website <http://alysonrichman.com/category/interviews>.

AR: To that end, the reader will experience a marked change in Lenka as the novel progresses. She starts off as a naïve, young art student, who is often more of an observer than a participant. Then becomes an artist willing to steal supplies for the young children in Terezin and anxious to become part of a secret resistance of artists trying to get their art work to the outside world. By the end of the war, she has wholly changed – both as a stronger woman and as a more risk-taking artis.

JL: You portray life in the Czechoslovakian prison camp of Terezin as horrible of course, yet quite different – more filled with intrigue, politics and passion – than most other books that deal with the Holocaust. How did this pivotal landscape evolve in your consciousness as you were creating this book?

AR: I was lucky enough to be able to visit the Czech Republic and meet with survivors of Terezin, some of whom had been artists in the Technical Department there and knew many of the real-life characters depicted in the book. Their testimony really enhanced my writing of the novel and breathed life into it that would have been impossible without hearing about their actual experiences. When you think of the Holocaust, you immediately and rightfully imagine those haunting images of tragedy and death. But through my research, I learned another aspect – the ability of the human spirit to defy great odds just to live – as well as to still be able to love and to create – even under great duress. I remember listening to one survivor of Terezin who said: “We thought we were going to die... so what choice did we have. We still wanted to love and laugh. We still wanted to live.”



"Aryan Way", by Joseph E. A. Spier, 1943

From the Holocaust Awareness Museum, Philadelphia, PA

Suggestions for Reading Critically

Adapted from the Library of Congress Center for the Book Guidelines

The best stories are those that connect to human experience. They reveal an important truth, or provide a profound sense of kinship between reader and writer. Searching for, identifying, and discussing these truths deepens the reader's appreciation of the story. Asking questions, reading carefully, imagining yourself in the story, analyzing style and structure, and searching for personal meaning in a work of literature all enhance the work's value and the discussion potential for your group. Here are some helpful suggestions on how you can become a more critical reader.

Make notes and mark pages as you go. Reading for a book discussion - whether you are the leader or simply a participant - differs somewhat from reading purely for pleasure. As you read a book in preparation for a discussion, ask questions of yourself and mark down pages to which you might want to refer again. Make notes like, "Is this significant?" or "Why does the author include this?" Making notes as you go slows down your reading but saves you the time of searching out important passages later.

Ask tough questions of yourself and the book. Obviously, asking questions of yourself as you read means you don't know the answer yet, and sometimes you never will discover the answers. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions because often the author is presenting difficult issues for that very purpose. Look for questions that may lead to in-depth conversations with your group and make the readings more meaningful.

Pay attention to the authors' messages. As with any skill, critical reading improves with practice. Remember that a good author uses every word in a text deliberately. Try to be aware of what the authors are revealing about themselves and what they want you to learn about life from their perspectives.

Analyze themes. Try to analyze the important themes of a story and to consider the premises with which the author started. Imagine an author mulling over the beginnings of the story, asking, "what if" questions.

Get to know the characters. When you meet the characters in the book, place yourself at the scene. Think of them as you do the people around you. Judge them. Think about their faults and their motives. What would it be like to interact with them? Are the tone and style of their dialogue authentic? Read portions aloud to get to know the voices of the characters.

Notice the structure of the stories as well as the organization of the entire book. Sometimes the structure of the book illustrates an important concept or helps to create a mood. Notice how the editor structured the book. How do the stories relate to each other? How are the individual stories and selections structured?

Who are the narrators? How does the sequence of events unfold to create the mood of the story? Is it written in flashbacks? Does the sequence of actions make sense to you?

Make comparisons to other stories and works. Compare the book and the stories to others that have a similar theme or style. Often, themes run through an author's works that are more fully realized by comparison. Comparing one author's work to that of another can help you solidify your opinions, as well as illuminate qualities you may otherwise miss.

Suggested Book Discussion Questions

Created by Lee Fertitta, Port Washington Library

1. Does the use of alternating voices for each chapter interfere with the story or add to it?
2. Who is more heroic, Josef or Lenka? Why?
3. *The Lost Wife* has been called the *Sophie's Choice* of this generation (by John Lescroart). Do you agree?
4. Colorless Amalia seems a poor substitute for Lenka, but Josef cares deeply for her. To what is he attracted? Why does she choose Josef instead of Isaac, who loves her “in a way that [Josef] never could”?
5. Jakob would probably be diagnosed as autistic in today’s world. Josef is frustrated with him but unable to make any changes, even those which might give Jakob some more independence. What holds him back?
6. Lenka reclaims her art before being sent to Terezin and it becomes her life there. She becomes complicit in the theft of material to provide the children of the camp with a method of coping through art. What did art and its creation mean to the residents of the camps? What did it mean to Lenka?
7. Rita and Oskar’s baby dies from lack of nourishment, but Lenka manages to capture mother and child in charcoal. Determined to have her picture represent life, she makes her finger bleed until drops of blood can be added to the drawing, making the work an act of defiance. What else could be considered an act of defiance at Terezin?
8. Rebekkah discovers Josef’s name listed among the dead and tells him about it. His reaction is to question what love means - “...to mourn for an eternity...” What does love mean in the face of such horror?
9. Petr finally paints Lenka and her mind and body respond to the intimacy of his look. Do you agree that someone who sits for a painting is “naked all the time,” that the artist is able to see through to your soul?
10. The musicians of Terezin performed Verdi’s *Requiem for the Dead* three times. Each time, the singers were sent east, to the death camps. Others continued to volunteer, knowing they were singing for their own deaths. Yet they performed anyway. Can you think of any other situation where that kind of spirit moves people even in the face of death?

Suggested Book Discussion Questions

Created by Penguin Publishers

1. At its core, *The Lost Wife* is the love story between Lenka and Josef. Discuss the deep feelings that run between the two. How do you think that the love they shared managed to survive the long years of separation? Do you think you'd recognize a loved one after being apart for so long? In what ways do you think the love they shared helped them to survive the atrocities of the war?
2. Art and color maintain a great significance throughout the course of the novel—the green of Josef's eyes, the red of the strawberries growing near his family's country house, and then later, the drab browns and grays of the Terezin and Auschwitz. Discuss how the author's description of color affected your perception of the novel.
3. Love is a theme throughout the course of *The Lost Wife*—not just the love between Lenka and Josef, but also the love between the families, the love shared between Lenka's mother and Lucie, and even the love that develops between those kept at Terezin. Discuss the significance of that feeling as it is laid out in the book.
4. In the author's note, Richman reveals that several of the characters that appear in the book actually existed. Did this change your perception of the novel after you read it?
5. Despite being overseas in America, Josef can never seem to let go of the memory of his wife. In what ways did his memories of Lenka serve as his own personal jail? What did you think of the relationship between Amalia and Josef? Considering they each were haunted by the death of their families, was it a relationship that worked for them or was it a relationship purely of sorrow? How does it contrast with Lenka and Carl's marriage?
6. Dina is one of the characters that we later learn was based on an actual person. Discuss her significance in Lenka's life, from when she first meets her on the streets of Prague, to when they reconnect at Auschwitz. How does Dina's spirit help Lenka get through the trials of Auschwitz?
7. Discuss the underground painters' movement at Terezin. Why do you think the men were so unwilling to allow Lenka to help at first? Was it merely because she was a woman, or do you think they had other reasons for wanting to protect her? In what ways did her taking part in the movement help shape the course of the rest of the novel?
8. In their own small way, Lenka and her mother attempted to maintain a sense of normalcy for the children at Terezin with their art classes and pilfered paints. What other instances of 'normal' life did you see at Terezin, and later Auschwitz? In what ways do you think that these efforts to maintain happiness even during hardship inform the power of the human spirit? How did you react to the children's creation of the opera *Brundibar*? Like *Brundibar*, Schacter's *Requiem* is also an act of defiance against the Nazis. Do you think such an act was worth the punishment of death?
9. What did you think of Lenka's deep need to keep her family together despite all odds? In what ways do you think the course of her and Marta's lives may have been altered had they opted to remain at Terezin, instead of following their parents to Auschwitz?
10. A lot of the history of the plight of Jews during World War II in Europe, and particularly the role of artists during the war, played a role throughout *The Lost Wife*. How did the research affect your reading of the novel? Did you learn new things about World War II and what happened to Jewish families? Were you inspired, after learning that some of the characters were real, to do any additional reading of your own?

If you liked *The Lost Wife*...

Fiction

***Beyond the Shore* by Connie Monk:** In 1937, Georgie Franklyn, an English artist, accepts the marriage proposal of a man she does not love. As the war looms, Georgie works at a seaside art gallery and tries to stifle her feelings for another man.

***How I Found America: Collected Stories* by Anzia Yezierska:** Yezierska writes of Jewish immigrants living and working in the Lower East Side of New York City. These 27 short stories are set between 1920 and 1960.

***Wildflowers of Terezin* by Robert Elmer:** Jewish Hanne Abrahamsen is a nurse who works alongside Lutheran pastor Steffen Peterson for the Danish resistance in 1943. Their relationship deepens as Jewish citizens are being deported to Terezin.

***The English Assassin* by Daniel Silva:** Priceless Impressionist paintings that were illicitly gained during World War II go missing and their Swiss owner is killed. Gabriel Allon, a spy and art restorer, tracks down the killers.

***Those Who Save Us* by Jenna Blum:** Anna Schlemmer and her 3-year-old daughter Trudy move to Minnesota after being liberated by American soldiers at the end of World War II. Year later, Trudy, now a professor of German history, begins to investigate the past that her mother will not speak about.

***Prague: A Novel* by Arthur Phillips:** Five American expatriates move to Prague in the early 1990s on financial, romantic and spiritual quests.

***War Story* by Sara Hely:** The Dulcimer family in rural England takes on a Scottish nursemaid in the early years of World War II. Both a love story and a novel of the Second World War.

***Sophie's Choice* by William Styron:** As the fierce lovemaking and fights of Nathan, a paranoiac Jewish intellectual, and Sophie, a Polish-Catholic concentration-camp survivor, intensify, Stingo, a writer who lives below them in a cheap rooming house, becomes more and more involved in their lives.

***Pictures at an Exhibition* by Sara Houghteling:** In the wake of World War II, Max Berenson, the son of an art dealer and his pianist wife, wanders Paris in an effort to recover his family's lost masterpieces, looted by the Nazis during occupation, and in the process uncovers an old family secret.

***Sarah's Key* by Tatiana de Rosnay:** When French policemen round up Jewish families in 1942 Paris, young Sarah locks her brother in a closet and promises to come back for him. In modern day Paris, Julia is writing an article about the round up and begins to investigate the fate of Sarah and her family.

***Skeletons at the Feast* by Chris Bohjalian:** In January 1945, in the waning months of World War II, a small group of people begin the longest journey of their lives: an attempt to cross the remnants of the Third Reich, from the Russian front to the Rhine, to reach the British and American lines.

***The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak:** Living with a foster family in Germany during World War II, a young girl struggles to survive her day-to-day trials through stealing anything she can get her hands on, but when she discovers the beauty of literature, she realizes that she has been blessed with a gift that must be shared with others, including the Jewish man hiding in the basement.

If you liked *The Lost Wife...*

Nonfiction

***Anton the Dove Fancier: and Other Tales of the Holocaust* by Bernard Gotfryd:** Gotfryd, originally from Poland, spent time in 6 concentration camps before immigrating to the United States after being liberated in 1945. This collection of 30 moving short stories recounts some of his experiences while being held prisoner by the Nazis.

***The Artists of Terezin* by Gerald Green:** Some of the prisoners at Terezin created art while being held. This is a collection of more than 100 drawings and paintings that survive as testaments to the triumph of the human spirit.

***A Century of Wisdom: Lessons from the Life of Alice Herz-Sommer, the World's Oldest Living Holocaust Survivor* by Caroline Stoessinger:** Alice Herz-Sommer, the oldest Holocaust survivor, is 107. Originally from Prague, she was captured and sent to Terezin, where she lost her mother, husband and many friends. This memoir of her life covers her early life in Prague to her life in England after the war.

***Fortress of My Youth: Memoir of a Terezín Survivor* by Jana Renée Friesová:** This is a memoir of a young girl, raised a Catholic by Secular Jewish parents, who did not even know she was a Jew until she was imprisoned at Terezin at the age of 15. Friesová writes of the horrors of the camp, but also of the artists, musicians, writers and intellectuals who were also imprisoned, as well as how she escaped the gas chamber.

***The Girls of Room 28: Friendship, Hope and Survival in Theresienstadt* by Hannelore Brenner:** Children were housed separately at Theresienstadt (also called Terezin). The children had an amazing array of world-class artists, musicians, and playwrights available to them—European Jews who were also on their way to Auschwitz. Under their instruction, the children produced art, poetry, and music, and they performed in theatrical productions. A group of these girls, now elderly, meet annually to remember their time in Theresienstadt.

***In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy From the Women of Terezin* by Cara DeSilva:** Women who were kept at Terezin defied the Nazis by writing down recipes from memory and creating a handwritten, hand sewn cookbook. This is the collection of recipes that were so carefully recorded — including chocolate torte, breast of goose, plum strudel — while the women survived on scraps of potato peels.

***A Time to Speak* by Helen Lewis:** Helen Lewis, a young student of dance in Prague at the outbreak of World War II, was herded into the Terezin ghetto, and then deported to Auschwitz in 1942. *A Time to Speak* is a memoir of her life before, during, and after the Holocaust.

***The Venus Fixers: The Remarkable Story of the Allied Soldiers Who Saved Italy's Art During World War II* by Ilaria Dagnini Brey:** Documents the contributions of a motley team of art historians, curators, and passionate amateurs who were appointed by Allied forces to save master works of European art from destruction during World War II. Written by journalist Ilaria Dagnini Brey, this is an account of the officers of Italy, quickly dubbed “the Venus Fixers.”

The Long Island Reads 2012 Committee

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Reader's Guide compiled by: Beth Gates, Rogers Memorial Library; Candace Hope, Huntington Public Library; and Loretta Piscatella, Middle Country Public Library.

**Special thanks to Astoria Federal Savings
and to Carolyn Fostel (1949-2011), who, through Astoria Federal, was a good friend to
Long Island Reads.**



**Contact your public library for more information about
Long Island Reads events during
National Library Week, April 8-14, 2012.**

Ms. Carolyn Rose Fostel

May 30, 1949 - December 15, 2011



Carolyn Fostel, 62, of Oyster Bay, New York, passed away peacefully on December 15 of complications from a rare blood disorder.

A former Assistant Vice President Community Relations Marketing Manager at Astoria Federal Savings, she was admired by not-for-profit leaders throughout Long Island and the metropolitan area for her leadership, guidance, support and endless efforts to foster networking and collaborations. She was the founder of Astoria Federal's "Kids Tools for School" program. Now in its twelfth year, it provided school supplies to thousands of disadvantaged Long Island schoolchildren each fall.

Ms. Fostel earned her undergraduate degree in English from Fordham University and her Master's in Education from St. John's University. During the early years of her career she taught elementary school and was an Adjunct Professor of English at St. John's University. She was also an Associate Director of the University's annual giving program and past President of its Alumnae Association. Following this, she was Director of Development for the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University and was a development officer for North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset. She co-created North Shore's 35th Anniversary "Celebrate Life" quilt project.

A former trustee and member of the Executive Committee of The Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington, Ms. Fostel's articles about antiques and collectibles appeared in numerous national publications and she was a guest on the Food Network.

She is survived by her mother, Lucille Fostel.

Long Island Reads 2012 Evaluation

1. Have you read, or do you plan to read, *The Lost Wife*? Yes ___ No ___.

2. Have you visited the Long Island Reads website at www.longislandreads.org?

Yes ___ No ___

3. What Library do you belong to? _____

4. Please let us know what you thought about today's program. _____

5. Have you participated in any Long Island Reads events in the past? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, which one(s)? _____

6. Are you in a Book Club? Yes ___ No ___

If you are in a Book Club, please tell us a little about your club: (For example: How often and where do you meet? How do you select the books? How many members? What type of books do you read?)

7. If you would like to suggest an author or title for Long Island Reads 2013, please do so below. Please tell us why you think this would be a good choice.

Your name (optional) _____

Are you a library employee? Yes ___ No ___

Do you reside in Nassau__ or Suffolk__

Please return this form to a member of the LI Reads committee here today or to:

Deborah Clark Cunningham
Head of Adult Reference
Harborfields Public Library
31 Broadway
Greenlawn, NY 11740

Thank you for participating in Long Island Reads!