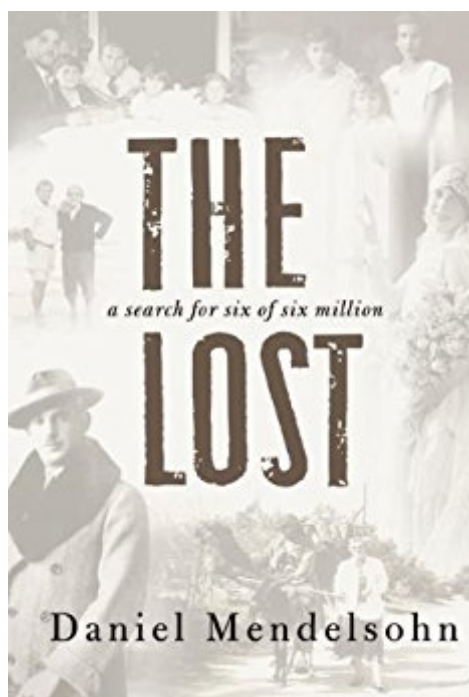


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The Lost: The Search For Six Of Six Million (P.S.)



Synopsis

In this rich and riveting narrative, a writer's search for the truth behind his family's tragic past in World War II becomes a remarkably original epicâ "part memoir, part reportage, part mystery, and part scholarly detective workâ "that brilliantly explores the nature of time and memory, family and history.

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Customer Reviews

This is one of the saddest, most heartrending books I have read in years. I could not bear to stop reading, even when I was revolted by the descriptions of torture and death that were visited upon innocents. There can never be too many books about the Holocaust, particularly in these days when some deny that it even took place. This one is especially important since it contains so many eye witness accounts from aged people whose voices must soon be quiet forever. As a young boy growing up among his extended Jewish family Daniel Mendelsohn was mystified by the tears that broke out whenever he entered a room occupied by his grandparents and great-aunts and uncles. He looked so much like Schmiel, a man he only vaguely knew to be an uncle who had died in Eastern Europe during World War II. Fortunately, Daniel became interested in family history at an

early age and began to ask questions and keep records. Eventually, as an adult, he and his siblings undertook to discover what had actually happened to Uncle Schmiel and his family. The resulting journeys took Daniel to Ukraine, Israel, Poland, Sweden, and Australia among other places and allowed him to meet many former residents of Bolochow, the shtetl in which Daniel's family, including Schmiel, had lived. He interviewed witnesses to the deaths of Schmiel and his wife and daughters and recorded sometimes conflicting accounts of their deaths and those of thousands of others. At times the stories are repetitive, but they are no less compelling to read. I liked this book on a number of levels. First, as I said above, it's another essential Holocaust record and must be one of the last to record so many first hand accounts of what happened during the Final Solution. Second, the many characters are very appealing.

I am about to be 60 and am reading a book that fills me with regret, *THE LOST*, by Daniel Mendelsohn, the story of how he tracked down the final days of his grandfather's brother and that man's four beautiful daughters. I have finished the first fifth of the book and am convinced that it is the greatest literary work that I have read since my youthful exposure to Proust and the early novels of Saul Bellow. Mendelsohn combines a personal memoir of growing up in a "modern" Jewish family in America with historical detective work based on old photographs, recovered letters, interviews, trips, internet sites devoted to the little towns of Eastern Europe and Jewish genealogy, and couches it in the most beautiful and evocative and thoughtful sentences, often based on the style of Proust (to whom he has given the opening epigraph of the book), organizing his discussion around an analysis of the first book of the Torah (even mentioning my Haftarah passage, Lech lecha) and Homer's Iliad. He brings to life long lost people, places, philosophical issues, with drama and mystery. He has assembled a complete genealogy of his family and has testified to the power of memory, language (Yiddish, Hebrew, German), family love, pride and humor. He is unfailingly generous in his descriptions and conclusions. The book is illustrated with photographs taken by his younger brother. The parallels with our own family history, our life in New York and in Florida, the impact of parents on the intellectual growth of their children, the impact of religious stories and scholarship, the diaspora to America and Israel, are incredibly resonant and moving, and all this in the first 70 pages.

Once in a while a book comes along that has the power to involve me emotionally. "The Lost" is one of those books, a complex, multilayered modern odyssey. Subtitled "A Search for Six of the Six Million," this 2006 non-fiction tome is the personal story of the author's recent quest to discover

exactly what happened to six members of his family who perished during the Holocaust. Like myself, Daniel Mendelson is an American Jew. He's a generation younger than me, but, unlike myself, some of his family members lived in Eastern Europe in the 1940s, and his beloved grandfather's brother, sister-in-law and four teenage daughters were "lost" during that awful time. The author's journey led him to the Ukraine, Israel, Australia and Scandinavia. He spoke with elderly survivors who had some memory of his family or the way they lived. What he learned was shocking, chilling and yet somehow inspiring. The people he spoke to were old, their memories were fading, and some of the stories they told were merely rumors. Often, some of the stories contradicted each other. Questions were raised. Did one of the daughters have a romantic relationship with a young Polish man who tried to save her? What was the real reason that one of the brothers emigrated to Israel in the 1930s? What was it like for the people who had all their possessions and dignity stripped from them? How did each one of these six people die? And, ever more importantly, how did they live? As the author is a professor of classics, mixed in with the basic story are very interesting discourses on complex interpretations of the Old Testament. There are many interpretations of the way the ancient words were used and discussions about their true meaning.

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