

Rogue Librarians, Episode 6
Maus: Part 2 (Close Reading)

Welcome to the sixth episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians, and sometimes a guest, discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, Winthrop, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We would love for you to participate in our discussion. Please visit www.theroguelibrarians.com if you would like to leave a question or a comment.

Okay so um, as always, we want to start with a book that we've recently read. Alright, I am reading *Darius the Great is Not Okay*, and it is about an Iranian-American boy named Darius or Dariush, depending on where you are, who has this opportunity to go to Iran and meet his grandparents and it was just a lovely way to experience that culture in a way I think that you really couldn't in any other context to see it through the eyes of someone who is Iranian American who is seeing it for the first time. He has a connection to it but also it's new. So it was just a perfect way to sort of get a little flavor of that and he also deals with depression uh and uh you know bullying and that sort of thing. Yeah, I highly recommend the sequel to if you liked it. Yes, no, I was talking with somebody and I don't want to spoil anything for anybody but I hinted at what apparently happens in the next book, I was like yeah I could kind of tell. That's great.

So um kind of on the theme with the topic of this episode. Um I recently read *The Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal, which is a very famous book, um it's an autobiography, I believe, of coming from the Holocaust, being a Jewish person who was incarcerated in one of the camps and basically this German soldier on his deathbed wants a Jew to be brought to him, so he can ask the Jew for forgiveness, um he can be forgiven on his deathbed and basically it brings together the question of what are the limits of forgiveness, who has the right to forgive who? Um and then later on in the book, it brings up a second question um when Simon after the war is over, meets the German soldier's mother, um and it brings up and she has no idea about any of the things her son has done, and then it brings in the question of responsibility of should Simon have told the mother what her son was actually doing, should he have let her just go in peace because she had lost everything. And it kind of brings just in the larger question of forgiveness and responsibility within the holocaust. It's a very excellent book I recommend.

Um a book I recently read is called *The Four Winds* by it's a novel by Kristin Hannah and um it was about um it was about the Depression and um and the Dust Bowl and it had to do with a family that was living in Oklahoma and having to um to move well, they tried to survive the Dust Bowl and then having to eventually move to California just to try to survive. And and it was incredibly um moving and enlightening and and so I really um you know, even though it's it's a work of fiction, the research that was done for this book is really incredible and I learned things that I never even thought about before. So it's great, great.

One of the books I read recently was *And Only to Deceive* by Tasha Alexander. This is the first book in the Lady Emily mystery series. And if you like historical fiction, especially that takes place in the late 19th century in Britain, and if you like mysteries, I highly recommend the series.

So today we will continue discussing *Maus*, which was recently removed from a Tennessee school district's curriculum and has been challenged at other points since it was published about 30 years ago. A few reminders before we jump into our discussion today. First, a reminder of the reasons why it's been banned most often. It's because of the language, brief nudity, violence and suicide as they're depicted in the story, anti-ethnic or ethnic insensitivity, and unsuitability for young readers. And for a complete discussion of that, please see our fifth episode, but we're not going to be talking about those things right now. Uh and also a trigger warning. Uh we'll be discussing some of the horrors of the Holocaust.

Maus is a graphic memoir about Spiegelman's relationship with his father, Vladek, and Vladek's experiences before and during the war. It illustrates Spiegelman's conversations with his father in the late 1970s and his process of writing his father's story. Part I focuses on Vladek's relationship with his wife Anja and their experiences during the first four years of the war. The second book depicts Vladek's experiences in Auschwitz and the aftermath. And both parts uh deal with Art Spiegelman's own like dealing with the legacies of you know, parents who survived these things. Yeah, it's really interestingly done because it goes back and forth between um Art who is Artie uh the young Artie interviewing his father and those, those panels are interspersed throughout the father's telling of um the experiences that that took place. So it's really an interesting way to write a book or particularly a graphic novel. And I found it compelling definitely.

And at the beginning of Part two, you see him struggling to deal with the fame and success he experienced after publishing Part One and people trying to get him to turn into a TV series or merchandise and struggling with those feelings of guilt and unsure how to continue the story as he's getting into Auschwitz as well.

Well, let's move into our first segment on characterization. I wanted to start with a discussion of Vladek because he is our main character and he's a very complicated character for multiple reasons. It is mainly from his perspective, though we get to see him from Artie's perspective too. And one thing that I found when I've read this a few times now, and one thing that I've found every time is I feel very uncomfortable with how Vladek is portrayed in the first book, especially because he seems to often be providing some comic relief and um making fun of his neuroticisms like his obsession with saving everything and picking things up. And um and I think it's not until part two that you understand where a lot of that comes from, and it's because of his resourcefulness, his ability to save his ability to think ahead, that seemed to help him survive. I mean, it seems like partially luck, partially who he befriended, partially where he was at the right time, and partially because of this may be innate desire or maybe something he learned that you always want to prepare for the future and it's better to eat just a little bit and save it um really seemed to help him. So, um and Art Spiegelman mentions in the book struggling with maybe portraying him as the stereotypical miserly Jew and is he leaning into that too much, and that is what I especially found uncomfortable in his portrayal is um that it does sometimes seem to be portraying his father as a stereotype in those moments, but then, like I said in Part two, I think you understand his father much better and he felt less like a stereotype. So what did you all think of Vladek's portrayal?

You know, I don't remember exactly when he discussed, you say it was in Part two where he discussed that he was afraid. I think was right in the beginning of Part two, when he was talking to his wife. Exactly. Um, but I'm very much because it's all in an interaction. Um, I really enjoyed, maybe it was the comedic element, but I just enjoyed his personality, although there were things that were not answered for me, like what was going on between him and his current wife. Like you never really get to the bottom of what was going on between those two, But he's always complaining about money with her. Like she always wants money, she wants to change, but you never get a sense of whether or not he was way off the mark or not like some of this. And then when you hear her perspective, it sounds like this is just awful. So, you know, we sort of never really determine that. But I would also say that stereotypical or not, it very much reminds me of, I

don't know, kind of a friendly Jewish presence that you would see in a lot of other places so that it became familiar to me, is that a bad stereotype? You know, it depends on your interpretation. I just probably shouldn't even go there because I'm not Jewish. So you guys tell me.

Well I can jump in a little bit, having, having um having spent a fair amount of time around members of Jewish families and observing their interactions. And um I kind of found it a little heartwarming in the sense that I felt it was it was an accurate portrayal of, of a father son relationship where they drive each other crazy, but in the end they love each other to death and you know, from the telling of the survival story that um that Vladek would do anything for Art and vice versa. Um and and I think it shows the generational differences between the two. I think it shows the the um the just um not just the generational, but you know Vladek obviously was living in, in Poland during the war and went through hell. I mean the very definition of hell and art was spared all of that. Art grew up in America and was born after the war. And and you know, from Vladek's perspective, Art is pampered. So there's, you know, that whole, oh, you're such a softie. Oh you just don't understand. Oh, you, you know, there's that trying to teach the lessons and the best way he knows how and art just kind of being the come on dad, you know, like the rolling of his eyes kind of, there's a heartwarming, um you know, like everybody can identify without their parents I think, and I do think it also really showed this push and pull between Art and Vladek because Art was so clearly bothered by so many of the things that his father said.

And I think you see that love between them much more in part two. In part one, he just feels so angry with his father. That's I think part of why I felt uncomfortable is because you get a sense that he hadn't seen his father in a couple of years when it starts, and they have very little to no relationship at the beginning. So I think by telling the story, he's able to actually build a relationship with his father and understand his father for the first time and he's really upset, he calls his father a murderer when he finds out that his father had burned Anya's, his mother's, diaries. And I don't know that he ever forgives him for that because he really wanted to know her perspective too. But um but I think he does understand him by the end. He does, I think, love him by the end. So you do see that growth and that change in his character and in their relationship. I think Vladek loved him all along, but didn't show it in a way that was easy for Art to deal with because he was often complaining about him or how he did things. And so it seems like Anya committed, died by, suicide when Art was 20, I believe, in 1968. And um it seems like

that event, instead of bringing them together, pulls them apart. And so it's only by discussing her death and the Holocaust that they're able to come back together.

I do think, I mean, I mentioned this a little bit earlier off before we start recording, but I think it's it's really interesting the way that Art portrays himself. I mean, I think if anyone in his shoes would want to be a little revisionist, but I think he he gives a very raw, this is what kind of happened with, you know, and I mean obviously with with Vladek you gotta cut the guy some slack. I mean, he his parents were murdered and he was very young and even after surviving Auschwitz he had to try to find a way to live in society. I mean, I cannot imagine, you know what that does to a person and then to try to have normal human relationships afterwards. I mean, to to go through the war and have at any possible second anyone you care about remotely could just be murdered in an instant. And I mean that you cannot form normal relationships after that. I cannot fathom how that would affect you.

That really hits home in the moment when he pulls out pictures of the family members and only one of his brothers survived. If I remember correctly, everyone else in his family was killed, and in Anya's family, it was her brother who was in the United States before the war started. Like he happened to be there then and then I think one other relative of hers survived. And so you just think, yes, how do you go through that and come out—I don't want to say normal— but like not not completely scarred.

And I think an interesting thing about Art, if we wanted to move on to Art and Anya, um Art is clearly struggling with mental health issues. Um particularly you learned a little bit about it in the comic that his dad finds the prisoner on the hell planet and— Sorry to interrupt. What did you think of the inclusion of that comic in its original form in this book without the mice, for example. The art in it was different and I found it really compelling, so dark. And I think that really brings into the whole discussion that we were having about generational trauma. You know, I feel like there's a lot going on with him that way. And it really shows how that trauma conveys. But I also think Anya clearly had some mental health issues before the, before the war, Before the war, during the war and after the war she had postpartum depression, she did, and she she was sent to a sanatorium for a few months. So it's interesting to me that Vladek was able to sort of understand that about his wife but not about his son, maybe because of gender and generation too. I mean, I think of the time period mental health was not, I mean obviously, you know, things are just a lot of factors there for sure.

And what did you think of his portrayal of Anya in general? I mean, we get to know her fairly well, but not as well as Vladek. Well, you know, I feel like everything that we know about her, we mostly know through Vladek. We know very little from Art's perspective. You can very much feel the storytelling happening when we're hearing about Anya, you can hear that it is a story being told to the author. So yeah, we we get a picture of her that is and he's clearly never gotten over her. Vladek has not. So, you know, I feel like we're definitely seeing a slightly rose-colored, and I just I just feel the intensity of the of the the trauma of losing Anya after surviving, you know, like he did everything he could to help her survive throughout, you know, before they went to the to the camp and then after they were in the camp and knowing how fragile she was. You know, having been in a sanatorium with the postpartum depression and they survive, and they are reunited, they come back together and they have Art and and you know like the worst is behind us kind of thing. You can only imagine and then to lose her in the tragic way that he lost her.

Like I just can't even imagine, you know, and and it just reminds me of there's there's a book and I don't even know who the author is, but I happen to find it in the in a in a synagogue library one day that's called that basically says things can only get worse. I mean then there is an element of that if you're Jewish is that you know, things can always get worse because, which is why you break the glass at a wedding. I mean it's like even in our joyous moments we know that the other shoe's about to drop because you know, they all want to kill us and maybe we'll survive and then we'll eat. But they all, you know like it's the, it's the joke but even it's not a joke. I mean it's kind of, you know, it's it's a sick reality. Um that that continues to happen and to this day for what it's worth.

I mean, I can't tell you the number of Jews I know that keep several \$100 in cash just in case they ever need to make a quick exit from the country, and that's just reality.

Anya touched me deeply um um particularly because I can identify, I had postpartum depression, after both my children's births. And so I could empathize with what that must have been like for her and it would have been so much worse in 1940 whatever because um you know, now there's a lot of research and openness and talking about how it happens, but to go through that the way she did and not being able to take care of her baby and obviously she loved, you know, you you should, but but to not be able to take care of that baby because you know, you feel this sense of despair. I mean, it's it's very it's real. I'm sure they didn't have any

medication in those days or at least nothing like what is available today. And I mean honestly, it I'm just I'm in awe of the fact that she did survive. She was very, you know, and I think in a sense, I mean, I don't think this was one of his intentions or themes, but in a sense it shows the strength of and resilience of people despite having, you know, um a mental illness, right? And the fact that he thought she was physically so fragile too.

And I think for Anya without Mancie, um the woman who helped her in Auschwitz, she probably wouldn't have survived because Mancie brought letters from Vladek and back to Vladek. Um she helped her get better jobs and looked after her and without the um kindness of Mancie she may not have been able to survive. And I think you know, another point you made me think of, Marian, is um the despair she felt when they discovered that Richieu had been um had died because the aunt had poisoned herself and the children when she knew they were coming for them and would end up in gas chambers. Um I mean I've heard that losing a child is the probably the most traumatic thing that can happen to a person and that often affects the relationship between the couple to, but if anything, it actually seemed to bring them closer together because they were determined to survive no matter what and they hunt for him in orphanages for months afterwards and struggled to come to terms with his death and Art said that he was always, he felt like he was always being compared to this ghost brother who was perfect because he never got in trouble. He was just a picture and that was really hard for him growing up is knowing that his parents remembered this beautiful, wonderful boy and he could never compete with him.

Doesn't bring up a lot of questions about how as a, as a parent, I would think that you would, you know, I'm looking through a modern lens obviously, but I if I had a child that had died, I would want much like I am with my mother and my children were fairly young when my mother died, but my mother is very much a presence and we talked about it all the time. I feel like you would want your child to understand something about the sibling that wasn't there, you know, and how do you do that without traumatizing the child?

Right. Seems like a line that you have to walk. Yeah, for sure. And I don't know what the answer to that is because because regardless, I mean, we're talking about trauma, you know, the parents are survivors of trauma and they're forever changed by that trauma. So, so feeling that you're doing the right thing for your living child um, by you know, more realizing your deceased child. I mean, there there's no right way and even if there is a right way, you're two traumatized

individuals trying to do the right thing and also grappling with your own grief and your own, you know, just your loss. I think that they had never brought it up, it would have been still an issue somehow.

I do want to just say one little thing because Françoise was the character—Françoise, who is Art's wife, wife. The fact that she appears mostly in the second book I also think softens that book and because she brings in a third perspective that softens Art's anger towards his father. So I think that is another difference. Just going back to what we talked about before in terms of how Vladek is portrayed in the first book versus the second.

Yes. And something just to add to that Marian is remember the moment when they go to the grocery store and on the way back they see a black man and Françoise stops, you know, lets him in, they drive him to wherever he's going and Vladek is horrified that she does this and he's saying terrible things in Yiddish about the um black man. Françoise is like, I don't understand how you can be racist when people have been racist towards you. Um, so that conversation pops up there and so I think you're right that having Françoise is there, um, sometimes she steps in for the reader, sometimes she steps in for like this person who's like, oh, your father isn't all bad, you know, like trying to soften him somewhat to for sure for sure.

Which, but I think that's so interesting too that you brought that up also because my understanding, um, is I mean historically during the Civil Rights Movement in America, the Jews were marching with the African Americans, you know, for rights and you know, to, to end racist policies because there's such a shared experience there of persecution.

Yeah, for sure. And um, so you know, I just want to say that to that, I'm sure that Vladek does not represent everyone's views, those were his own views and well and living in a racist country whose every law and newspaper story and everything else is feeding into that racism, you're not immune and it really does become an us versus them. Plus, he's had an experience where he was robbed and you know, when you're again, that's another trauma added onto layers and layers of trauma.

Well, should we move on to our segment on themes? So, so I thought there were several themes, um but I thought the biggest one is one that we've touched on to some extent already, which is that we need to remember and study the past in order to understand the people

affected by it and prevent it from happening again. Because if we don't learn about this, if we don't understand it, it is going to happen again, as we said before, as Winthrop explained very well like this has been happening, but hopefully the more people who understand it, um the greater chance we have of stopping it from happening, right?

For sure. For sure. And I think as we were just saying that Art understands his father much better after understanding what he went through. I think a major theme would just be the importance of working through these kinds of issues that and I don't I don't know that he meant to put that in as a theme, but it's a thing because it's what he's doing. And if you bottle it all up, it's only going to hurt you. Yeah. And I think that's exacerbated by the fact that Anya's diaries are destroyed because that's, you know, that is a in a sense of keeping of all that bottled up, that a lot of couldn't handle the pain of it. And so his catharsis was to destroy it. But that inevitably hurt Art terribly to have lost his mother. And I think hurt Vladek as well. I don't think he ever processed it. And I think that's part of why his relationship with his wife, with Mala, was problematic.

I think, I think that's exactly right. And another thing that kind of goes along with that is the guilt people feel for surviving when other people did not, and also their children feel for not having experienced what their parents experienced. And my takeaway was that the guilt isn't helpful. It doesn't help the person who survived. It doesn't help you personally. It just makes you unable to process what other people experienced. And it seems like his therapist was trying to help him realize that trying to help art realize that you can't hold onto this guilt.

And I, you know, it's it's luck that certain people survived. It's not that they were better than other people. Um, it it came down to, you could tell in this book, it came down to the tiniest details sometimes, where you happened to be at a particular moment, who you were with at a particular moment. The connections you have formed. So you it doesn't seem like guilt is a helpful feeling here.

I would argue that it's never helpful feeling so easy though. Well, and it's a weakness, maybe it's a weakness to feel guilt um, and to let it rule your life, you know that way? But I do, I mean survivor's guilt is a very real thing and I've heard that talked about a lot in connection, you know, not just with the holocaust, but anybody who survived a plane crash or you know, the people who didn't end up on the planes on 9/11 because of one thing or another, or the people who

were late to work that morning, you know, and so they weren't in the Twin Towers and um and you know, why did, why did one person survive and not the other? I, you know, I can't even imagine what that must feel like for people. Um and yet, you know, you have to think, you know, from, from Mladic's perspective, you know, Vladek survived so that there could be Art and it doesn't do Vladek any good to have survived if Art is going to live with this tremendous guilt that prevents Art from truly living and so on down the line. So I think you're right, I don't think that that guilt is ever going to be an effective. I think it's basically it's wasted energy.

Yeah. Um I kind of wanted to talk a little bit about, you know, the kindness is in this book. um you know, and you know, particularly the real kindness is not the I gave you money and so you helped me kind of kindnesses, but the real kindness is, and you know, one of, one of the people that that just really struck me so much in this story is the priest and how the priest, you know, talk to Vladek and his number, his number, his tattoo number, and what that means and tells him that, you know, on whatever day he's going to be released, he's going to he's going to go free, he's gonna go free and how Vladek holds on to that, you know, and it gives him hope and you know, I don't know, like you can say there's something mystical spiritual, you know, God like that happened in, in that experience, but what I found also compelling about that is that the priest was knowledgeable enough about Jewish numbers, that he was able to really turn that into something meaning for Vladek, and, again, to me that just goes back into this is why we need to read widely and know about different people. The priest obviously wasn't Jewish, but he knew and understood and was able to offer hope and how beautiful that was in that moment.

I agree, Marian, and I thought that the hope is what allowed them to survive or enabled them to survive because um the hope that he would make it through, okay allowed Vladek to fight for that um and to work for it. And with Anya, Mencie helping them and to know that Vladek was still alive and to hope that they could be reunited, helped to keep her alive. So it seems like um kindness is incredibly important, especially when you don't expect anything in return. And hope is incredibly important because without hope um you have nothing to help you, I think get their help you to survive.

Right. Right. You know, it's interesting today, just today, I was having a conversation with another friend about how doctors used to treat cancer diagnoses in the country and you know, so, you know, 20-30 years ago, they wouldn't necessarily tell the patient that they had that they had cancer and that it was going to kill them. They would just, you know, prescribe a course of

treatment and give them hope that they were going to get well. And you know, some people thought that was pretty controversial because you weren't being honest with the patient, but what was the point of basically, you know, at that point, there were no cures for certain types of cancer and it was a death sentence. So what was the point? And you know, not telling them, hey, you're going to die in six months or six weeks or whatever. You know, allowed them to live out their lives in a more positive and fulfilling way and you know, kind of, you know, my parents always said, you know, we're always dying from the day we were born. So, you know, you choose to live every moment um as if it's your last and but but not being afraid of death, living each moment to live your life to the fullest, and that's that's what that hope can provide.

I think one of the themes that I certainly hope came across, and I'm never sure how well it comes across to a non-Jewish audience, because obviously that's not something I'm ever going to be able to experience. Um but so much of the elements of survival boiled down to people just trying to survive, and that sounds simple, but I mean for for a lot of those of other people, especially the Jewish people, there was no, I have to survive, so I can have children, I have to survive for this or this. It's I am a person who's trying to live a life and for whatever reason, these people trying to murder me and putting me through the darkest horrors that humanity can possibly can construct, and my humanity is being ripped from me on a day to day basis um because as much as all these themes about hope and and and you know, maintaining identity through, you know, something like the Holocaust are important, I don't want it to get lost to amongst all those wonderful themes that these are not people that are trying to do something noble, they're not trying to be you know, these great self sacrificing people that are dying for a cause they were trying to die for and they didn't want to die. There are people that are just trying to live their lives and have that ripped from them mercilessly through the most evil machine that humanity will ever create as ever created. And I don't want that to be overlooked too. Maybe resiliency would be a way to describe that just the resiliency of humans, you know, that we're here and we want to stay.

Yeah. And it seemed like for Vladek, the fact that he was frugal and resourceful, helped him survive, right? The fact that he kept his blanket so that he could tie it up and then survive when everyone was crowded into the railway cars and crushed to death. I mean, that helped him. And he would point out those things that he did. He's like, well I saved this and I kept this. But I think you're right, Winthrop, that it's not a noble thing. It's just like I want to live. I don't want to die when they're trying to kill all of us.

The number. I mean, I don't know how common it was to be that resourceful as he was. But the number of times he could have died if you were just if this was a work of fiction that you were watching. If they had made this into a series, you would just be like, oh come on, you know, again, he gets away. You know, like I was just astounded by the number of near misses. It's one of the things he talks about, like, you know, a lot of it was just sheer randomness. Like there was not always a whole lot of, you know, it was just, I mean, you survived by sheer luck of the draw sometimes.

Um yeah, for sure. So he did do things like try to not be around when they were calling the people that were going to go in the gas chambers on the next right and because he had befriended some of the people leading, you know, by like giving English lessons to the kapo, and he deliberately knew that that was going to be help, That's gonna be helpful. So, and then that man would tell him like make sure you stand to the left on this day or you know, things like that to try to give him a heads up. Yeah, incredibly helpful to have those mercenary connections too. I'll give you this if you help me in this way and really, you know, you can really feel the mercenary, that word was kind of floating in my brain too because if you're gonna take yourself out when they're going to call all the names, then someone's going to go and what could be your place.

What did you think about the role of family in this narrative? Because I thought that family was clearly incredibly important to Vladek and Anya, especially how he was embraced by and his family and they all lived together multiple generations. But the familial bonds started breaking down during the Holocaust and I wasn't sure if he was trying to argue or maybe was arguing that um family is important no matter what or that when you're in something as horrific as the Holocaust, their traditional bonds are not going to be able to survive. Did you have a feeling one way or the other or do you think it's somewhere in between?

You know, I was thinking about the family bonds earlier when we were talking about on her postpartum depression and really how, you know, before we were having a discussion about what that was uh you know, as a, as a species, uh there was this whole family to help all of them through that someone to pay for the sanitorium, someone to cover for Vladek while he missed work for months, and someone will take care of the baby. So, you know, like there was so so much uh care that was given around mental health. In the past was because of close

families. And then that sort of degradation of the extended family is part of why so many women, you know, like in in the 50s etc. Suddenly it was like, what is, what are all these depressed women about? There was nobody to help. Um so yeah, I think certainly early on it was important and as more and more members of families disappeared in one way or another either because they had a way to escape or to go into hiding or thought, you know, that they did. Um or like his brothers who he said, he said we're just players basically they were gonna do whatever deal needed to be made, right?

Right. But, but so as as those family members disappeared from the story, then you started to see um you know, he's, there's a person from my village that was my neighbor, you know, and those people and they looked out for each other the same way family members would have looked out for each other because because that was like the next best thing to a blood relative to take care of each other and that's such a Jewish thing. I mean, I'm not saying it's only a Jewish thing, but like to have that tight knit community and like, like when um are these older brother or who he obviously never meets, you know what, he's basically just one day given to a woman and saying here take care of him. Like that's to have that. Like the Jewish people are such a unique people. I feel like in that way that like we are one people that you could just trust someone like that.

I feel like it's just such a unique, beautiful thing. It is and it's it's a tribal kind of a thing. I mean you know people talk about your tribe and and how important your tribe is and um but that is that is a real that is a real thing and I think that's a good point to bring that out.

Let's move on to our final segment, a discussion of the significance, and, as a reminder, we try to get into the significance in a few different ways, and we'll start with a song tv show or film that we would recommend for a character. So, Dorothy, do you want to? Yeah this is probably maybe a little on the nose but I recently heard a podcast of all things uh talking to Ken Burns about the documentary that he spent many many years making about the U.S. and their place in the Holocaust, the first episode of that. Yeah and it's uh from all reports on this podcast very very good and you know would continue to explore a lot of the themes I think that we find in the book.

Did you think so, Winthrop, that it was worth watching? Definitely. It's broken into three parts: this before the war, during the war. And I'm guessing after the war is the third part, and they're

two-hour-long episodes. So it's and it's obviously heavy content for obvious reasons. So um I watched the first episode at the end of Yom Kippur to kind of get to the end of the fast. Um and then I kind of needed a break from it for a minute because and this is true I think whenever you're consuming any Holocaust media there's a certain frame of mind, at least for me as a Jewish person, I have to be in. I can't just it's not just a casual fun read like you have to be in a specific mindset.

I have always said that took me years both for *Schindler's List* to finally watch it. Well it was years because I did see in the theater but it was in theaters for a long time and *Hotel Rwanda* which we rented you know and you know you want to see it and you know it's going to be amazing and you're going to learn so much but you're like I'm in the mood for a Holocaust movie today. There's really hard. Really well done. Oh yeah I'm glad to hear that.

How about we go to our second piece which is a question that we had while reading this. So, Winthrop, I think you had a question for us. So this is gonna be a little bit more of a heavy one. But it's a question that first came to me when I took my first visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum um last year when I made a trip to D.C. And then came up again reading this book um as an observant Jew and a Jew living in the 21st century today, the word Zionist has become very much a dirty word that people misattribute. Um and it's a word that people use to give themselves a pass to be anti-Semites put it that way. But um the word both in the Holocaust Memorial Museum and in this book he mentions Vladek mentions a man at one point I said you know he was a good man, he was a Zionist. Um and I'm a Zionist myself and I will explain that by saying that to me Zionism is and what it should be defined as to anyone in an academic setting, the right to self determination of Jewish people in their indigenous homeland and I will leave it at that. I don't want this to be the conversation with politics of Israel, but because the way that Israel has seen today it just every time that I see that in that setting I can't help but wonder how many people look at that. I'm like well those bastards had it coming because that is the attitude that people have towards Zionism today, towards Jews today, frankly 98% of Jews are Zionists. Um and it and again all that Zionism is is the right to self-determination in your indigenous homeland for Jews. But because of the way that has been misconstrued and weaponized frankly by the left, I am liberal. But the left has weaponized Zionism in a way that is very dangerous and scary and I can't help but wonder as you know whenever that word is used, what the audience, especially a non-Jewish audience, will think and it worries me. So that's that was the question I had in reading this book.

Yeah and it is complicated, there's no question, you know, um every Jewish person that I've met has a complicated relationship with Israel because um because of how uh politicized the word Zionism or being a Zionist has become. Um and I think people who are not Jewish, and even some who are Jewish, don't fully understand the history of how Israel came to be the state of Israel, the modern state of Israel. And I think that um you know there's a lot of dialoguing that needs to take place and um as on many controversial issues, you know that dialoguing would bring a lot of understanding and a lot more rapprochement, I think. And, unfortunately, I don't think that's normally taught in the history curriculum in the U.S.

I mean, it is hard, you really can't talk about the creation of the modern state of Israel without mentioning the Holocaust and putting the two, I mean the Holocaust ends in 1945. The modern state of Israel was founded in 1948 and basically on the backs of Holocaust survivors and refugees. I mean, Israel became a nation of refugees from Holocaust survivors and then Jews that were expelled consequently from basically the rest of the world. So it became a place to put all these refugees. And, to this day, many Jews will tell you that Israel is the only place on the face of the earth that they feel is safe for Jews. And I don't I don't want this to make this a political thing.

I don't want to go into this whole discussion is real, but it is you can't really discuss one without the other, I feel like, but I mean, and I have a question that just, well, it's kind of been in my head and I wasn't sure where to put it in this in our segments, but I just want to ask each of you um at what age or wherever did you learn about the Holocaust, Dorothy?

It would have been in high school, middle school.

And what what level of depth did your learning entail? You know?

Again, as I said, history was not something that I paid extra close attention to, but it was impactful to me in a way, you know, the horrificness of it. Um so it was one of the things that you do remember, but it seemed pretty much tied in with all of the war and not a thing that you weren't learning outside of that, right? So you you knew that it happened during World War Two and you knew that it was Hitler, but that was about the, some of what I remember.

Yeah, I'm just, I'm asking from the perspective of of what goes into a curriculum of a particular place, what was your experience?

I remember the texts that we read. So in fourth grade we read *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. That made a big impression on me. In seventh grade, we read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which also made a big impression on me. So we learned about it to some extent in history class, but it's the literature that really stuck out in my mind and I know that um, neither of those deals with this piece of the Holocaust, you know, you're not in the camps. Um and I don't remember how old I was when I first I read *Night* at some point, but I don't remember how old I was.

I still have not read that, that we predated that. Yeah, I highly recommend it...to my daughter about it. It was, it was haunting. It's one of those books, the two texts as you were saying, you don't want to just like, oh, I'm in the mood for that. Well, I mean I had that trouble reading these two books is I, you know, life is life is hard and um you know when I get home from work, I want to just relax and not pick up *Maus* because I know what it's about and I know it's going to be a downer and I know I'm gonna have a lot of feelings and I know I'm gonna probably think about it and not fall asleep.

So um my personal experience to Holocaust education, I didn't learn about it at all in a history context. So not unlike you, Alanna, I learned about it as a freshman reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which was not part of our textbook. It was an additional book that our teacher um brought, you know, brought in for us to read, and to clarify, this was high school. This is high school, yeah, freshman year of high school. Um and of course I didn't grow up on either coast. I grew up in the middle of America, and there are not a lot of Jews where I grew up. Um and it just struck me, you know, as an adult didn't strike me then as 9th grader. But it struck me as an adult how little and and how watered down Holocaust teaching in America is. Um, and so that was kind of what I was getting at there. Um I have to, you know, shout out to my particular ninth grade teacher. Um, I think she understood the horrors of it more and fortified our reading of the diary of Anne Frank by having the class watch a documentary that was called *Kitty Returns to Auschwitz*, and I don't know if that's still something that's available through Youtube or whatever, but it would be an interesting um an interesting documentary to look up because it's it's about a woman who survived Auschwitz um who was a child at that time and then many years later, as you know, I don't know how old she was, but as a very mature adult, you know, I want to say like for fifties, sixties maybe goes back really probably with the project of, you know, telling, you

know, being a witness to history and takes the documentary team around the camp, you know, and talks about her memories of it and the horrors and that kind of thing. And that's what hit me, you know, um and made me curious and made me want to learn more and made me start to really question what human beings are capable of.

So, um, well, should we go to our passage or passages that spoke to us. Marian, do you wanna... I'm dying to jump in here with this because this one really affected me. And I know it affected some of you as well because we've discussed it off mic. But on page 45 of the addition of the first edition of the first *Maus* story, um, there's this this passage where Art, Artie, is um in a session with his therapist and discussing, you know, so much is brought up by interviewing his father and and learning about all these atrocities and he he's got a lot of stuff going on and and his therapist says to him, so do you admire your father for surviving? And um, Artie says, well sure, I know there was a lot of luck involved, but he was amazingly present-minded and resourceful. And the therapist says, then you think it's admirable to survive? Does that, does that mean it's not admirable not to survive? And Artie is just like, I think I see what you mean. It's as if life equals winning. So death equals losing. And then he goes on and discusses the fact that, you know, the thing about it is those who lived were not necessarily the most resourceful and those who died were not necessarily those who deserve to die and winning.

That's when you start to realize and and fully grasp the whole randomness of how everything went down during this time period. It was there. I mean, there could not have been anything more random and and I just think about, you know, my life today when I think about, you know, safety and where I want to be and how I want to be safe and and um, you know, I don't there's certain areas that I don't want to be in as a female alone at night because it's not wise and the odds are that, you know, something might happen, you know, but but in this case you could do everything right and the randomness of, you know, you're just gonna get plucked off the street because you're in the wrong place at the wrong time or, you know, somebody hadn't, you know, just had a sticky trigger finger that day and one of the SS officers and they just decided to kill you or you know, it could be anything. And it's just something I really, I really pause and think about a lot.

I mean, and in terms of the Holocaust, you know, and we talked about the survivor guilt and you know, did you really win if you if you lived and you know, cause then you go on and you live with

this guilt or, or whatever. I don't know, it just it was a very powerful passage in my mind that that I really kind of wondered what the rest of you thought of that one.

Well, it makes me think about, you know, religious questions in general about the meaning of life and why we're here, which have never plagued me the way they do. A lot of people. I simply, you know, I don't need any more than what I see the world is an amazing place. People, you know, I love all the positive things about the planet are reason enough for me to be here. But but it does ultimately come down to that, like the randomness is what so many people object to and therefore need a reason for it, even if it's the weather. You know, we don't like the idea of randomness of whether we want, we want to predict it, we want to know how to prepare for it, you know, and we're always trying to, you know, we're obsessed with that. I mean, it was one of the most powerful passages, I think. Um I mean it really, it brings up a lot of interesting questions about the way that Holocaust stories are told in general um survivor stories.

Um I would also, just as an aside, encourage both of those in the room and listeners obviously too, if you ever have the opportunity to meet a Holocaust survivor to listen to a Holocaust survivor speak um to take advantage of that opportunity because there is nothing quite like experiencing first-hand someone's account told to you, even if it's just listening to a recording of someone. Um and as time has progressed to, I mean, now the roles of of survivors, children of survivors has has increased. We touched on it, I think briefly last episode too. Um but just to hear people's stories and just really understand what people went through, I would just highly encourage people to do so.

And Winthrop, I think you had another passage you wanted to draw our attention to as well.

Yeah, absolutely, so page 54 of the edition that I had, it's pretty early on in book one um when um Vladek is in a POW camp, I believe, and um it is one of the few Hebrew passages in the book. Um but they recite...which literally would translate to how good and pleasant it is, when the people of Israel can come together more generally translated how good and pleasant it is, when people can come together to celebrate each other's company. And it just spoke to me a lot about the spirit of the Jewish people um that even an awful place like a POW camp um you know this that that is what they you know, would go back to is, you know how good and pleasant it is for the people of Israel to be here together. Um was just something that really was powerful to me.

That was, that was beautiful Winthrop, thank you for that. In closing, we just wanna to remind you or to announce that in our next episode we will be discussing the book *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier, which is also a graphic novel um a little bit lighter, so don't be frightened away if this was a little too heavy for you, it was a little too heavy for us and we feel like we need to go a little lighter for our next episode. So please join us next time um for a discussion on why that particular book um has been banned in various places. Um and as always if you would like to leave us a question or comment, please visit theroguelibrarians.com. And if you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you find your podcasts, and thank you, as always, for reading with us. Books are meant to be read. Bye!