


"An extraordinary, rich novel that will leave a powerful mark on readers' hearts."

—Kim Michele Richardson, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek



THE PARIS CHILDREN

A NOVEL of WWII

GLORIA GOLDBREICH

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Madeleine, with her grandfather Alfred Dreyfus as a role model, commits herself to the dangerous role of rescuing Jewish children as a Resistance fighter. What other historic or personal figures might serve as a role model to young people confronting choices that call for daring and dangerous action? Take, for example, Martin Luther King Jr., a heroic health worker, or a relative or friend whose ideals and actions you admire.
2. Given her dual roles, one as a covert Resistance fighter and the other as an agent for the Vichy government, Madeleine must often hide her true feelings. How does she accomplish this, and how might you act in similar circumstances?
3. Madeleine must balance her love for Claude against the importance of the life-saving work that engages them both. How might you confront a similar struggle in your own life? Should the needs of a larger community be prioritized rather than the yearning of an individual?
4. When Madeleine's credentials are questioned, she flirts

with her interrogator. This is counter to her usual modesty, but it is a ploy that she uses to protect the children she is intent on saving. Do you think that end justifies the means? Can you think of other situations that parallel her dilemma?

5. The dean of the Institute of Social Work speaks of lighting small candles against the darkness of tyranny. Describe the small candles that glow in various chapters of *The Paris Children*. Take, for example, the cooperation of the masons, the efforts of the nuns who shelter Lucie Dreyfus, and the bus driver. What small candles have you yourself ignited against darkness?
6. Madeleine's physician father insists that he must treat anyone who needs his help, ally or enemy. Would you agree with his attitude?
7. Although Madeleine's primary goal is to rescue endangered Jewish children, she also becomes a demolition expert. How does she confront each role? Do they require similar skills, similar courage?
8. The Resistance demands secrecy for the protection of its members. Do you think more openness would have been helpful to their operations?
9. Madeleine commits herself to helping the downed pilot before she knows whether he is English or Axis. She avers

that she must help no matter who he is because he is a human being in trouble. Do you think a Nazi combatant deserves the kind of care and concern she offers?

10. Resistance victories met with severe reprisals from the Nazi occupiers. How did the reprisals affect the surviving freedom fighters? Do you think that the greater good outweighs the suffering of the few?
11. Madeleine's grandmother assures her that "this life is worth its grief," an assurance that Madeleine accepts and embraces. How do you respond to that concept?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

What kind of research did you undertake to bring Madeleine and her France to life?

My undergraduate and graduate studies in history at Brandeis University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem prepared me to delve into many different texts. I explored the necessary background of the Dreyfus family and the tragic years of World War II with the requisite emphasis on the German occupation of France and, more specifically, with the systematic war against the Jewish community, a genocide with a demonic focus on Jewish children. I visited both Paris and Toulouse and developed a feel for the locales. During my student days in Jerusalem, I met French Jews who had lived through that period, and their stories influenced my writing.

The Jewish Scout program figures prominently in your story. Have you yourself participated in scouting programs?

I was a very reluctant Girl Scout for a very brief period, but my two daughters and my son, during their adolescence, were avid members of Young Judea in the United States, which partners with the Tsofim, the Israeli Scout movement. Through their affiliation, I came to know many Israeli scouts and their leaders, who were often guests in our home. I also attended

their meetings during my trips to Israel and listened to stories of the role that Jewish Scouts played in their heroic efforts to rescue endangered Jewish children.

Do you, like the Dreyfuses, place great emphasis on family?

My husband and I have always prioritized our children, and we are proud that, as adults, they, in turn, are caring and involved parents to our eight widely scattered grandchildren, transmitting the values that we have always held dear. Compassion, honesty, and courage are important in our family. Humor and laughter are our lodestones.

Did you have family members who, like Madeleine's grandfather, inspired you?

The short answer is that my family served as my inspiration. My parents were both born in Poland, and the stories they told of the families they left behind, many of whom became victims of the Holocaust, greatly impacted my life. My mother and father were involved in efforts to save their surviving relatives, and they emphasized the importance of helping those in need, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. There is no word for 'charity' in Hebrew. We speak of *tzedakah*, which means "justice," and it was justice and compassion that motivated Madeleine, words that were as important to my parents and grandparents as they were to the heroine of *The Paris Children*.

What inspired the words "this life is worth its grief"?

Given the sadness and injustice that often surrounds us, it is important to remember the joy and goodness that is possible.

Literature, fiction and nonfiction alike, gives us the opportunity to recognize that balance and to understand that beyond grief, there is value in the lives we live and how we live them.

What does your reading list look like these days?

Poetry (I seek out Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, A. E. Housman, and Yehuda Amichai.), novels (I read and reread George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and Cynthia Ozick.), and for true comfort, I travel to Venice with Donna Leon and her marvelous detective, Brunetti. I also try his recipes. Yes, I love cookbooks.

If you had one piece of advice for writing historic fiction, what would it be?

Read, research, read some more—dream!

What do you want your readers to take away from *The Paris Children*?

Never turn away from injustice. Do not allow history to repeat itself. Emulate Madeleine Levy, Claude Lehmann, and Simone and Serge Perl, and sustain those who fight for all that is good and moral in our complex and wonderful world because this life is worth its grief.