



Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa

Steven Robins

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As a young boy growing up in Port Elizabeth in the 1960s and 1970s, Steven Robins was haunted by an old photograph of three unknown women on a table in the dining room. Only later did he learn that the women were his father's mother and sisters, photographed in Berlin in 1937, before they were killed in the Holocaust.

Steven's father, who had fled Nazi Germany before it was too late, never spoke about the fate of his family who remained there. Steven became obsessed with finding out what happened to the women, but had little to go on. In time he stumbled on official facts in museums in Washington DC and Berlin, and later he discovered almost one hundred letters sent to his father and uncle from the family in Berlin during the Nazi terror. The women in the photograph could now tell their story.

Letters of Stone tracks Steven's journey of discovery about the lives and fates of the Robinski family, in southern Africa, Berlin, Riga and Auschwitz. It also explores the worldwide rise of eugenics and racial science before the war, which justified the murder of Jews by the Nazis and caused South Africa and other countries to close their doors to Jewish refugees. Most of all, this book is a poignant reconstruction of a family trapped in an increasingly terrifying and deadly Nazi state, and of the immense pressure on Steven's father in faraway South Africa, which forced him to retreat into silence

REVIEWS

Letters of Stone is a moving and thoughtful book and a terrifying reminder of how quickly families can forget their past' – Vivien Horler, Weekend Argus

'An absolute triumph of storytelling. Not satisfied – or perhaps even able – to see any detail as isolated, Robins creates a kind of meta-context for his family's story that encompasses eugenics, various genocides, war, apartheid, subjugation, dehumanisation, nationalism, cultural assimilation, exile and the creation of political situations that result in a desperate search for refuge across international borders.

While this might seem like a project in which ambition could outstrip coherence, Robins again manages this vast body of information with enormous elegance, creating three distinct but intertwined storylines: the story of his need to connect to his family; the story of the family left behind in Germany; and the story of the catastrophe of prejudice and subjugation. Each of these narratives follows its own arc and Robins controls the tension admirably. It builds and builds so that one becomes enthralled to the point that it is hard to close the book for any period of time.' – Karin Schimke, Cape Times

'Letters of Stone is the story of the weight of memory, of the burden of guilt and regret; of the obliteration of hope, of identity, of human beings.' – Michele Magwood, Sunday Times

'A personal yet authoritative memoir – an immensely worthwhile read. As an academic Robins has meticulously researched the content, yet it does not read as a lecture. Rather it is a loving family tribute where individual personalities shine through.' – Gillian McAinsh, The Herald

'An extraordinary memoir ... This deeply moving and brilliantly written account of trauma, history and silence is a layered excavation. What Robins brings to this deeply personal and shattering family story is a

scholarly subtext that transcends time and history and finds resonance in contemporary politics and history across continents.’ – Marianne Thamm, Daily Maverick

‘This is a most exceptional and unforgettable book – locating, tracing and coherently presenting the debris of a family’s efforts to survive the ultimate devastation. Steven Robins steps into that place of densest silence, where death took place, to say the unsayable. One reads it with one’s heart in one’s mouth, learning the deepest meanings of the word “anguish”.’ – Antjie Krog

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Chester Grantham:

Reading can called imagination hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book mainly book entitled Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa your mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every single aspect that maybe unknown for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a book then become one web form conclusion and explanation which maybe you never get previous to. The Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa giving you another experience more than blown away your thoughts but also giving you useful information for your better life on this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning an activity. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

Clarence Lowery:

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