



A Ritchie Boy

Linda Kass

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Told as a series of interconnected stories, Linda Kass's captivating, based-in-truth novel *A Ritchie Boy* is about assimilation, hope, and perseverance.

When he was fifteen, Eli and his parents escaped war-torn Austria, which had become more hostile to its Jewish citizens, for America. They moved from New York City to Columbus, Ohio, where they established a home and assimilated into American culture. Eli attended university, was later drafted, and became a Ritchie Boy because of his command of the German language. Ritchie Boys, the novel reveals, were WWII military intelligence officers who aided Allied forces, in part by interrogating German prisoners of war.

Eli is the book's common thread, and his stint as a Ritchie Boy is only one point of focus. The book's stories begin when he is still a boy in Austria; they conclude with his marriage in the US. Eli's story is documented via the people central to his life, including his mother's Christian friend from home, who pleads with a prominent Jewish businessman to sponsor Eli's family to come to America; Eli's Ritchie Boy cohorts; a young immigrant who meets Eli through friends; and the photographer at Eli's wedding. The standalone stories about him are delightful as they make room for these perspectives to emerge, resulting in a thorough picture of Eli's life and the events that shape who he becomes.

The book is replete with rich historical details, including a firsthand account of the antisemitism that Eli experiences on a school ski trip just before Hitler rises to power, and, in another story, his compassion for a prisoner of war. The interwoven stories of *A Ritchie Boy* are captivating, showcasing a group of German and Austrian nationals who utilized their language skills to help the Allies win the war.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (July / August 2020)

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