

Invisible Ink

Guy Stern

Wayne State University Press (Apr 14, 2020)

Hardcover \$27.99 (200pp)

978-0-8143-4759-1

Guy Stern's entrancing memoir *Invisible Ink* draws on a cornucopia of experiences from his rich and varied life.

Beginning with Stern's childhood and time as a military intelligence officer in WWII, the book's reminiscences have a flash-free poignancy. Stern, the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, was a teenager during the rise of Nazi Germany, and his everyday experiences are potent. He describes the father of a friend coming to his house to say that Stern was no longer welcome at the gym—a small heartbreak portending impending horrors. Such daily antisemitism, occurring before the Final Solution was ever presented, carries an implicit warning about what evil looks like before it blossoms.

It is their unostentatious quality that gives those early anecdotes their quiet gravitas. They jump from one to another, their thematic groupings vague, as they move from early challenges toward Stern's later career. Accounts of classroom moments, dinner parties, awards ceremonies, and board appointments breeze from one to the next. Sections devoted to Stern's grand romances with his late and current wives are relayed with emotional depth, and there's jovial humor and genuine humility in each story.

A joyful, grateful tone is pervasive, even in the book's dryer chapters. A thematic assertion that Stern became like invisible ink in the face of oppression is sometimes lost in the book's later focus on his teaching, research, and administrative careers; some of the book's charm is absent in these accounts, which are of niche interest.

Interspersing intellectual brilliance with deep emotional intelligence, *Invisible Ink* is a smart and compassionate memoir about a life well lived. It is steeped in historical significance and emphasizes getting the most out of every moment.

JESSIE HORNESS (March / April 2020)

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