

Heroines of the Kitchen Table: Stories of Survivors

Questions for Discussion

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Part I

1. Why do you think Grandma distrusted Hitler when others were so drawn to his charisma? Do you believe that some people have a heightened intuition/a “sixth sense”?
2. Why do you think the grandfather was upset about Grandma talking about the events in Germany before and during the war to their granddaughters?
3. Which characters risked their own lives to show kindness to Grandma and her sons? Why do you think they were willing to do it? Do you think you would have given bread and shelter to these travelers if you owned the bakery in Heidelberg?
4. What do you think Grandma meant by “hungry for power”? Do you think there are any world leaders who are “hungry for power” today?
5. What was the significance of the four-leaf clovers?

Part II

1. Why was Hildegard so worried about Heinrich?
2. Did the shoemaker’s family believe the propaganda about the Jews? Why or why not?
3. How do you explain Alfons’s return?
4. Can you imagine rebuilding your store and home as Alfons did?
5. Grandma talked about the shoemaker and his son, Heinrich. How can you explain this “coincidence”?

Part III

1. Savta’s (Sofia’s) mother sent her away to a convent. Why do you think she told her that she was their only hope? Can you imagine the feelings and emotions of her mother?
2. Why do you think the soldier in the forest let Sofia go?
3. What do you think happened to Sofia’s family?
4. How did Sofia end up in Siberia? Was Russia safe?
5. Why did Sofia go to Bialystok?
6. Did Sofia believe that she would be reunited with Jacob, her baby’s father?
7. Why did the family leave Poland, only to start again with nothing?
8. What did Chaim (Jacob) mean when he spoke of his four diamonds?

Part IV

1. Claudia’s father had to leave his family to fight for Poland in the war. Who were they fighting against?
2. Claudia’s mother, Katerine, was arrested in the middle of the night. Why? (She wasn’t Jewish.)
3. When Claudia and the children were taken from their home, what did Claudia do? Do you think her actions may have saved their lives?

4. What risks did Claudia take to care for her brothers?
5. Why do you think Dr. Kanarsky took the dangerous journey with all those children through the desert?
6. How did Claudia manage to use her talent with languages to improve her situation in India? What were the ultimate consequences?
7. What was the most difficult part of Claudia's journey?

Part V

1. When the stranger on the plane was asked if he found his uncle, he replied "Yes and No." What did he mean?
2. Why is Felix obsessed with the concept of evil?
3. What do Wolfgang's "journal" entries tell us about his life and his emotions?
4. If you had to write a letter to Felix about man's inhumanity to man, kindness and evil, what would you say?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What did the four heroines have in common?
2. How did their journeys differ? Whose was the most difficult and why?
3. The author believes that these stories must be told, why?
4. How were each of these factors important in the Holocaust?
 - a. The conditions in Germany after World War I (economic, social and political)
 - b. Propaganda
 - c. Hitler's character (his ego, charisma, leadership, cunning, ruthlessness)
 - d. Deep-seated anti-Semitism and hatred
 - e. The desire of European nations to avoid another war
 - f. Losing individual identity by grouping and labeling people as "Aryan", Jew, homosexual, etc.
 - g. The power of the German military and the Axis countries
5. Are any of these factors present with leaders and nations today?
6. Where does evil originate?
7. A recent article in *Daily Mail* reports new genetic studies that suggest "holocaust survivors pass the genetic damage of their trauma on to their children"

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3206702/Holocaust-survivors-pass-genetic-damage-trauma-children-researchers-find.html>

What are your thoughts on this? Could 'epigenetic inheritance' also apply to evil?
8. Recently a World War II Veteran, Sidney Caplan, was quoted as saying "Fighting in a war is the most ridiculous thing in the world. They're trying to kill you and you're trying to kill them. That's the whole basis of war. After it's over you wonder what the hell you were doing." So, why is there war?

(Metrowest Daily News, <http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/article/20141228/News/141227620/sthash.g42Z2v52.dpuf?Start=1>)