



Frieda's Song

Ellen Prentiss Campbell

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The lives of two women become intertwined across generations in Ellen Prentiss Campbell's historical novel *Frieda's Song*.

In 1935, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, a Jewish psychoanalyst, leaves Nazi Germany for the United States, where she builds a new life in Rockville, Maryland. In 2009, Eliza, also a psychoanalyst and the single mother of a troubled teenage son, moves into the house Frieda built. By accident, she discovers Frieda's diary. Thereafter unfolds a story of how, for one summer, the women's lives mirrored each other, despite a difference of decades.

Frieda's story is based in truth; through her work at Chestnut Lodge, she introduced psychoanalysis into the treatment of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Her thoughts and experiences are woven into Eliza's in a masterful fashion. Asking more questions than it answers, the story develops into a meditation on the ambiguities of motherhood, the helplessness of parenthood, and the frustrations caused by the clashes between professional ambitions and professional realities. It also reveals how people need mentors, regardless of their ages and positions in life.

With a sharp eye for the contradictions inherent to every person, the same events and personality traits are viewed from three different perspectives: Frieda's, Eliza's, and Eliza's teenage son Nick's. These tie together through carefully placed narrative touching points. The complete picture of what is happening emerges between the lines. But although it is acknowledged in her diary, Frieda's Jewish identity is written as if from the outside, sans her deep knowledge of the Torah and the Talmud; the values that would have come with her political affiliation on the far left are also missing.

Frieda's Song is a powerful historical novel in which women across generations share deep experiences.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May / June 2021)

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