



"We're more than a book club!"

Home | About | Contact | Buy Our Guides | Become a Member | Book Club FAQs | Blog

Home ▶ Blog ▶ Q&A with Leslie Levine Adler and Meryll Levine Page, sisters and co-authors of Jewish Luck

Q&A with Leslie Levine Adler and Meryll Levine Page, sisters and co-authors of Jewish Luck

Posted on May 29, 2014 by [Laura](#)

Leslie Levine Adler and Meryll Levine Page are not just co-authors, but also sisters who grew up together in suburban Columbus, Ohio. Their family descended from Russian Jews who fled to the U.S. in the early 20th century, which explains the sisters' shared interest in Russian history and women's history. Last fall, Leslie and Meryll published the non-fiction book *Jewish Luck: A True Story of Friendship, Deception and Risky Business*, a combination of personal stories and relevant historical detail. It recounts the experiences of Vera and Alisa, two women Leslie first met in 1976 during her post-secondary studies in Leningrad, and their "struggles against the anti-Semitism and patriarchy of the Soviet regime."



Leslie and Meryll recently took the time to talk to Bookclub-in-a-Box about how this book came to be, and the obstacles their friends had to overcome in Soviet Russia.

What made you decide this story should be turned into a book?

Leslie Levine Adler: It was a moment when I thought that life had turned out so completely differently from anything I could have imagined. It needed to be documented. That was the moment when I was attending the wedding of Vera's son in the Cayman Islands with my family. Here was this woman I had met on the street in Leningrad in 1976. I had left all my Target clothes to her that summer along with a promise to write. Now, she was treating my family to rooms at the Ritz-Carlton to attend the wedding of her son. When her son came to boarding school in Minnesota around 2001, little did I know how close he would become to my family. In 2010, we are all together as one family with our other friends, RD and Lars, on this "pirate island." I had never dreamed that Vera would be able to come to the U.S., much less that our children would know each other. The fact that she also made a small fortune for herself and chose her country of residence was intriguing as well.

Meryll Levine Page: Reflecting on Vera's life and learning more about her friendship with Alisa and Alisa's own life story made Leslie declare, "This story must be written." With Alisa and Vera's agreement, Leslie began to craft a book outline on the flight home to Minneapolis from the Cayman Islands. The idea marinated and developed before she mentioned it to me. My retirement of five months left me searching for meaningful work in addition to my grandmotherly role. The story piqued my interest when I realized it addressed a basic question that follows me through life—what would life have been like had our grandparents not immigrated to the U.S. from Russia? Vera and Alisa's story fused my professional interests in women's history and Russian history.

What was the writing process like, and how did it affect your relationship with each other?

Leslie: As the younger sister, I was afraid my voice might not count. I also had a lot at stake emotionally because so many of these people in *Jewish Luck* are my friends. I am a very emotional and intense person and Meryll can be more intellectual and detached. It was like facing all your worst fears but coming out whole. It was a very brave thing for us to do, and it wasn't always easy. I think we both

Subscribe to Our Newsletter

 Receive HTML?

[View Newsletter Archives](#)

[Manage Newsletter](#)

[Subscription](#)

Recent Posts

[Q&A with Leslie Levine Adler and Meryll Levine Page, sisters and co-authors of Jewish Luck](#)

Leslie Levine Adler and Meryll Levine Page are not just co-authors, but also sisters who grew up together in suburban Co ...

[Read more...](#)

[Big changes mean our biggest sale ever: 50% off all print guides](#)

Dear Bookclub-in-a-Box readers, An important announcement about changes to our website: due to the increasing prefer ...

[Read more...](#)

[Q&A and contest: Risa Klarman, author of a Toronto-set literary murder mystery](#)

Risa Klarman is a Toronto-based lawyer with a love of Greek and Roman classics. This past December, she self-published h ...

[Read more...](#)

[Book review and contest: The Invention of Wings, by Sue](#)

matured and our relationship is not as polarized. There were many times when I could stand back and think that our roles had reversed, which was fun.

Meryll: The first day of interviews, Vera and Alisa told us they weren't just friends; they called themselves sister-friends. Soon Leslie and I realized we were becoming friend-sisters through the process. It was difficult at first because Leslie and I are very different personalities, we have different work habits, and we look at the world differently. We did learn that our differences were a strength. Leslie was the better interviewer, I was the better organizer, for example, and we learned from each other. Our editor suggested that we journal daily to each other about our feelings as we were writing and rewriting the book. That was enlightening because it helped us forge a working relationship rather than falling back on old patterns we developed as little girls. The writing process was a ping-pong game. As the retiree, I would write a section during the work week, put it up on Google Docs, Leslie read it and commented on Saturday, and then every Sunday we met to write, edit, and interview Vera and Alla. We were honest with each other and we pledged to understand all criticism as a way to make the book better. I feel we emerged stronger as sisters, which helped us better cope with our dad's death.

Leslie, this story largely revolves around two women, Vera and Alisa, who were your friends, whom Meryll didn't know very well. Why did you decide to collaborate with your sister instead of writing this book on your own?

Leslie: It was not a conscious decision to collaborate with Meryll. When she asked if she could be part of it, I couldn't say no to her. I could never have said "no" to my older sister until three-and-a-half years along in this project. There was no going back. However, the book might never have come to completion without Meryll and, certainly, would not have been the same quality. I don't think I had the self-confidence to take on this project by myself and being accountable to my sister kept me writing.

What was the biggest obstacle for these two women in Russia in the 1970s? And in the current day, what would you say are the biggest obstacles for women in Russia now?

Meryll: I think there was no "biggest" obstacle for the women in the 1970s but, rather, a series of hurdles. They were at a disadvantage from birth by being women and Jewish. They didn't want to take unreasonable risks that would endanger their families. Their knowledge of life outside the Iron Curtain was limited even though they knew more than most Russian teens about the West through their own reading and their parents' connections.

Leslie: I agree with Meryll. The distortion of information is a huge obstacle. We are witnessing that again along with the rampant corruption throughout Russian society. Making a career in Russia seems like building a castle in the sand that could be washed up at any time by the tide or trampled by a bully. So many times in the '70s and now, I hear from Vera the same phrase, "There is no future." It reminds me of Keith Gessen's quote from a Ukrainian ("Waiting for War" in the *New Yorker* 5/12/2014) stating: "You in the West, you get your democracy just like you get your coffee and your morning paper. It's like water coming out of the tap. You don't have to think about it. It's going to come every day."

Jewish Luck tells a very personal story, while also giving historical background on Communist Russia. Is there a larger message that you wish your readers to take from this book?

Leslie: It's amazing to me the difference that one encounter can make in a person's life—one action, one connection. If one is really open and aware, there are so many opportunities to witness unbelievable stories everyday and, in bearing witness, we give meaning to the stories. That is our role in history. I also never want to take for granted the good fortune of growing up in a free society.

Meryll: Everyone has a story and history only becomes real and meaningful when it is part of a personal context. That has been the takeaway lesson for me. The more I investigated the lives of Vera and Alisa, the more respect I developed for their resilient human spirits and the power of their friendship that sustained them.

Will the two of you continue to write? What are you working on now?

Leslie: I have loved writing the short essays for our blog on the website, and now my mind composes blogs daily. If I were to write another book, it would likely be similar in nature. I'm especially interested in twin sisters when one decides to leave the homeland and one stays behind. I'm interested in choices and contrasts, and there is so much fascination in non-fiction. Because I know the amount of

Monk Kidd

Bookclub-in-a-Box is excited to be giving away a copy of *The Invention of Wings* to one reader! To enter the contest ...

[Read more...](#)

Exclusive offer: Save 20% off tickets to see *New Jerusalem* in Toronto!

Buy your tickets through Bookclub-in-a-Box and save 20% off the box office price! In partnership with the Harold Gre ...

[Read more...](#)

work that goes into a book, I'd be hesitant to jump on that now. I think it's also a lonely endeavor. I loved writing with Meryll because she shared my fascination and obsession with each obscure detail we found.

Meryll: Leslie is generous. I could go off the deep end of historical trivia as I did in the first draft relating the history of the hotel in Stockholm where Alisa met her husband. I did see Leslie's eyes roll. Partnering with Leslie stayed my hand and ensured *Jewish Luck* is accessible to all audiences.

- [Post to Facebook](#)
- [Post to Twitter](#)
- [Post to Blogger](#)
- [Post to Delicious](#)

undefined

undefined

undefined

undefined

undefined

undefined

undefined

undefined

undefined

- [Add to Google Bookmarks](#)
- [Add to LinkedIn](#)

Like 0

This entry was posted in [Author Interview](#) and tagged [Jewish Luck](#), [Leslie Levine Adler](#), [Meryll Levine Page](#), [non-fiction](#), [Russian history](#), [Soviet Russia](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

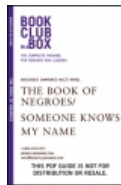
Bookclub-in-a-Box Blog

Latest Products



New Jerusalem—April 2, 2014

Random Product



Book of Negroes
(Lawrence Hill)
[PDF Guide](#)