

# Meet Kelly Rimmer



Kelly Rimmer is the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and internationally bestselling author of contemporary and historical fiction including, *The Secret Daughter*, *Before I Let You Go*, and *Truths I Never Told You*. Her 2019 WWII-set novel, *The Things We Cannot Say*, became a sensation, selling over 400,000 copies in North America alone. Her next novel, *The Warsaw Orphan*, will be released in 2021. Kelly lives in rural Australia with her family and a whole menagerie of badly behaved animals.

For further information about Kelly's books and to subscribe to her mailing list, visit [www.kellyrimmer.com](http://www.kellyrimmer.com).

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# A note from the author

In the winter of 2018, I was invited to speak at a book club near my hometown. As soon as I arrived, I joined a lively conversation about family histories—a key theme in the book I was there to discuss, *The Things We Cannot Say*. One of the book club members shared the story of an infant smuggled from a ghetto in Hungary in a suitcase. I found this particularly fascinating because when I first planned *The Things We Cannot Say*, I'd originally considered a different structure, with more of a focus on Emilia (who ultimately became a minor character in that book). I'd planned to see her leave her home village and go to work to help rescue children from the Warsaw Ghetto, just like real-life Polish resistance heroine Irena Sendler. In the process of writing an early draft of that book, I realized that I needed to keep the focus of that story on Tomasz and Alina, so I reworked the structure and discarded that subplot.

But at the book club in 2018, I started thinking about that idea again for the first time in years. As we shared lunch together, one of the women asked me if I'd ever considered writing a sequel to *The Things We Cannot Say*. I'd had that question before, so I gave my standard answer—no, because I felt I'd tied up the loose ends of Tomasz and Alina's story. "Well, what happened to Emilia?" she asked me. "Couldn't you just write her story next?" Sometimes the muse whispers, and sometimes it shouts. In hindsight, the reason I couldn't fit more of Emilia's story into *The Things We Cannot Say* was because she needed to be the star of her own book.

So, to Lou Hoffman, Wendy, Sue, Lisa, Sonya, Tina and Jane—thanks so much for inviting me to your book club. And an extra-special thanks to Marina Wood for the conversation that inspired me to write this book.

A recent survey conducted by the Jewish Material Claims Against Germany found that almost two-thirds of the American young adults surveyed did not know that six million Jews died during the Holocaust. More than 10 percent of those surveyed believed that Jews caused the Holocaust. I couldn't find comparable studies of young adults

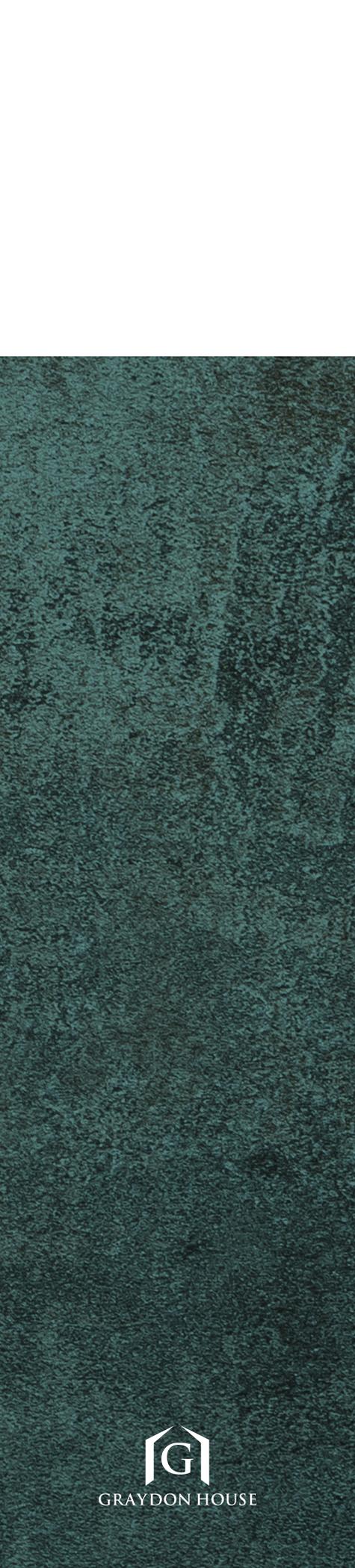




elsewhere, but I fear that for much of the world, the results would be similar. How can it be that our young people aren't aware of the unfathomable darkness the path of hatred and bigotry led our species to just seventy-five years ago? I do not believe it is the role of historical fiction to educate us about history. We novelists inevitably get things wrong, and sometimes we take liberties to massage our stories into place. I do, however, believe that great historical fiction should pique our curiosity and inspire us to educate ourselves. To that end, wherever it was possible in this book, I have tried to write a story that *could* have happened—and it is my hope that if you were not familiar with some of the events that take place in this book, you might spend time learning more about them. Those who were lost and those who survived deserve to be honored and remembered for their own sake, but also so that the horror they endured is never repeated.

Irena Sendler was a Polish nurse and social worker, and working with a team of other Polish women, she facilitated the rescue of more than 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto during the occupation. I became fascinated by Irena after reading *Irena's Children* by Tilar J. Mazzeo and *Life in a Jar* by Jack Mayer. Emilia's resistance work, as well as the characters of Matylda and Sara, was inspired by Irena and her team. Like Matylda, Irena was arrested by the Gestapo and interrogated—however, Irena was secretly rescued just before her planned execution. While Warsaw believed she was executed and posters were hung around the city to announce her death, Irena lived under a false identity in order to continue her work. Like Sara, Irena worked as a field nurse in a makeshift hospital during the Warsaw Uprising. And just like Sara when she stored the jar in Emilia's courtyard, Irena also kept a jar filled with slips of paper recording the details of the children her team had rescued. Like Sara, Irena buried her jar beneath an apple tree and later passed it to Jewish authorities in the hopes that families could be restored.





Another Polish hero I became fascinated by in the research for this book was Polish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum. While his story is not reflected in this novel, I couldn't have written it without his work. While trapped within the Ghetto with his family, Ringelblum led a secret project to document the reality of daily life there. With a team of historians, scientists and others, he compiled an extraordinary collection of documents, including posters, decrees, commissioned papers, diaries, photographs, ration cards and personal accounts—in total, more than 25,000 pages. Shortly before the Ghetto was destroyed, Ringelblum's Oyneg Shabes group buried the collection underground in three separate parts. One of these parts has never been found, but the other two were recovered in 1946 and 1950. The courage, persistence and dedication of the Oyneg Shabes group have given those of us in future generations some small measure of insight into what life was like within the Ghetto walls.

Various exhibits at both the Warsaw Rising Museum and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews inspired my interest in some of the issues and events covered in this book. An article by Joanna Ostrowska and Marcin Zaremba in *Polityka* magazine sparked my curiosity about the horrifying wave of sexual violence against Polish women during the Soviet occupation.

I loved writing this book, and I so hope you've enjoyed reading it. If you did, I'd be grateful if you could take the time to write a review online. You can do this at Goodreads.com, or if you purchased the book online, at the website where you made the purchase. Your review really does make a difference—it helps other readers to find my books. I love hearing from readers, too—if you'd like to get in touch with me, you can find all of my contact details on my website, [www.kellyrimmer.com](http://www.kellyrimmer.com).

My best,  
Kelly



The following resources were  
invaluable in the research for  
**The Warsaw Orphan**

- *Irena's Children: The Extraordinary Story of the Woman Who Saved 2,500 Children from the Warsaw Ghetto* by Tilar J. Mazzeo
- *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* by Samuel D. Kassow
- *The Warsaw Ghetto Oyneg Shabes-Ringelblum Archive: Catalog and Guide* edited by Robert Moses Shapiro and Tadeusz Epsztein
- *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum* by Emmanuel Ringelblum and edited by Jacob Sloan
- The Yad Vashem online photo collections
- *Tunnel, Smuggle, Collect: A Holocaust Boy* by Jeffrey N. Gingold, an account of his father's and grandmother's experiences in Warsaw during the occupation, based on audio and video recordings of their memories
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's online resources, particularly their incredible collection of first-person accounts
- Jewish Virtual Library
- Holocaust Research Project
- *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, by Marek Edelman
- *The Bravest Battle: The Twenty-Eight Days of The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* by Dan Kurzman
- *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* by Norman Davies



# The Warsaw Orphan

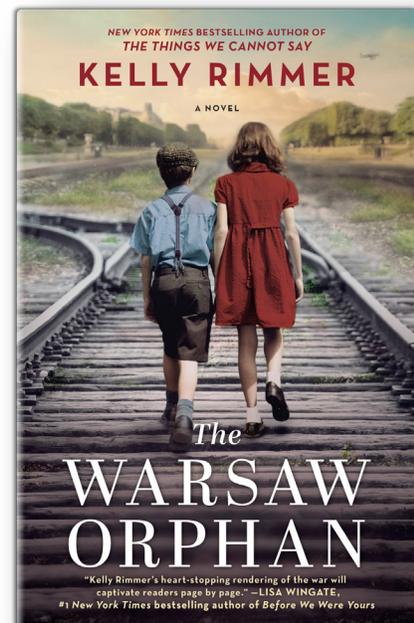
## Questions for Discussion

1. Early in the story, Emilia can be wildly impulsive and determined, and is even willing to manipulate to get her own way. Did you find her to be a likable character anyway? If so, why?
2. When we first meet Roman, he is a young man trapped in an impossible situation, but to his own thinking he is “a prisoner by choice.” What did he mean by this? Did you empathize with his decision to refuse to consider alternatives to moving to and later remaining in the Ghetto?
3. Roman initially refuses to engage with the resistance, but eventually becomes fixated on fighting back. Why was this? Do you think he made the right decision at each point in time? Why do you think Chaim saved Roman’s life?
4. During the Warsaw Uprising, Uncle Piotr undergoes a period of transformation. After years of focusing on himself, he becomes determined to look after his family. What drives this? Why did it happen in that particular moment?
5. Emilia’s thoughts on her unborn child also undergo a transformation. Did her ultimate decision seem realistic to you, given her circumstances? Roman initially has a very different perspective. Were you sympathetic to his refusal to accept baby Anatol?
6. Piotr and Sara have a complex relationship that is tragically cut short. What do you think would have happened between them had Piotr survived?
7. Were you already familiar with the historical events that take place in this story? Is there any aspect to that history that you’re planning to look into further?





8. Which characters in this book did you like best? Which did you like least? Why?
9. Which scene in *The Warsaw Orphan* affected you the most, and why? What emotions did that scene elicit?
10. Were you satisfied with the ending? What do you think happened next for Roman and Emilia?
11. Fiction set during World War II has been increasingly popular in the last few years. Why do you think readers are drawn to these kinds of stories in this present moment?
12. What will you remember most about *The Warsaw Orphan*? Who would you recommend this book to? Was this your first Kelly Rimmer book? If you've read any of her other titles, which did you prefer?



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