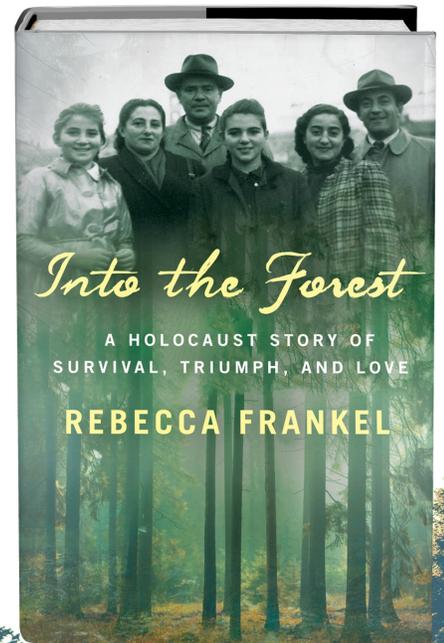


INTO THE FOREST

By Rebecca Frankel

Discussion Guide

1. The prologue to *Into the Forest* begins in 1953, at the Brooklyn wedding where Philip Lazowski discovers that the woman who saved him during the first Zhetel ghetto massacre is still alive and also living in the United States. How did this first scene shape your understanding of the characters? Did knowing how Miriam and Philip were connected to each other change your sense of the story?
2. In the first chapter of *Into the Forest*, we are introduced to Miriam Rabinowitz as a young girl who grows up into “a young woman liberated for her time,” who leaves the family home to open her own business, and marries for love and not security. Many of the women portrayed in this book display their inner strength and bravery, including Miriam’s sister, Luba Dworetsky, and Philip’s mother, Chaya Lazowski. Which of their stories affected you the most? Which woman did you relate to the most and why?
3. When Morris Rabinowitz and Miriam Dworetsky finally got married in 1933, it was for love. According to Miriam, it was “love at first sight.” For their generation, they seemed to have a progressive marriage, as both husband and wife had their own professional lives. What did you think of their relationship? What role did their marriage play in their experience of surviving the forest and the war?
4. Early in the book, we read about the influence of Nazi Germany spreading into Poland before the war. We also learn that the town of Zhetel was more resistant and immune to the anti-Semitism and violence against Jews that Hitler’s sway inspired elsewhere in the country. What did you think of the town of Zhetel? Why do you think some places are more susceptible to political influence than others? What do you think of the Christian farmers, like the Belsky family and the forester, and the country peasants that helped their Jewish neighbors in Zhetel? What about those who were motivated to help by money rather than friendship?



5. In chapter 8, Miriam Rabinowitz agrees to help eleven-year-old Philip Lazowski during the first ghetto massacre in Zhetel in April 1942. “If the Nazis let me live with two children,” she told him, “they’ll let me live with three.” Where one mother’s instinct might have been to turn him away and protect her own, Miriam’s instinct was to help the boy who asked her for it. What do you think of Miriam’s decision?
6. Throughout the book we learn a lot about the Rabinowitz family, as well as the relationships between two generations of sisters—Miriam and Luba, and Miriam’s daughters Rochel and Tania or as they’re later called in America, Ruth and Toby. What was most striking about these relationships? How did you feel their relationships helped them withstand the hardships they endured—in the ghetto, in the forest, and after the war?
7. Life in the forest was hard for every Jewish refugee who fled to its woods. What did you think about the dynamics of the Rabinowitz family’s camp? What did you think about those who opted to join the partisan fighters in comparison to those who chose to remove themselves into smaller, more removed groups instead?
8. Rochel and Tania’s differences as sisters were amplified in the woods—where Rochel was cautious, Tania was daring. In chapter 11, the author describes Tania in this way: “It was remarkably out of place here in the forest—where running was often prompted by terror, providing the only means of escape—for a child to run for pleasure. But Tania did.” What did you think about the Rabinowitz children’s experience of the woods?
9. Unlike many other survivors, even when the war was well behind them the Rabinowitz family was “in no hurry to disappear the ones they left behind—in Italy, in Zhetel, or even in the woods. It was unusual. For many, if not most, Holocaust survivors, any stirring of wartime memories was so painful and disturbing that they locked their experiences away, preferring to forget. Not the Rabinowitz family. It seemed like they talked about it all the time.” Why do you think this was? What difference do you think it made in their lives and the attitudes of their children?
10. There are various turns in this story where incidents of tremendous coincidence and good fortune change the course of the family’s experience and journey in monumental ways. In the prologue, the author calls this “fate.” Do you believe in fate or destiny?
11. If you’ve read other nonfiction accounts of Holocaust stories, how did *Into the Forest* differ? Did the Rabinowitz family’s experience shed new light on a part of Holocaust history for you? And if so, what did you learn from this book that you didn’t already know?