

THE LAST FLIGHT OF POXL WEST



Daniel Torday

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Reading Group Guide

About the book:

Poxl West fled the Nazis' onslaught in Czechoslovakia. He escaped their clutches again in Holland. He pulled Londoners from the Blitz's rubble. He wooed intoxicating, unconventional beauties. He rained fire on Germany from his RAF bomber.

Poxl West is the epitome of manhood and something of an idol to his teenage nephew, Eli Goldstein, who reveres him as a brave, singular, Jewish war hero. Poxl fills Eli's head with electric accounts of his derring-do, adventures and romances, as he collects the best episodes from his storied life into a memoir.

He publishes that memoir, *Skylock*, to great acclaim, and its success takes him on the road, and out of Eli's life. With his uncle gone, Eli throws himself into reading his opus and becomes fixated on all things Poxl.

But as he delves deeper into Poxl's history, Eli begins to see that the life of the fearless superman he's adored has been much darker than he let on, and filled with unimaginable loss from which he may have not recovered. As the truth about Poxl emerges, it forces Eli to face irreconcilable facts about the war he's romanticized and the vision of the man he's held so dear.

Daniel Torday's debut novel, *The Last Flight of Poxl West*, beautifully weaves together the two unforgettable voices of Eli Goldstein and Poxl West, exploring what it really means to be a hero, and to be a family, in the long shadow of war.

Discussion Questions:

1. After Poxl's book is published, his relationship with Eli becomes distant. He blames his busy schedule, but do you think there were other reasons why Poxl pulled away from Eli? Do you think Eli comes to understand and accept Poxl's withdrawal?
2. What do you think is the biggest lesson Eli learns from his experience with his Uncle Poxl's memoir in the immediate aftermath? How does that understanding change after years of reflection?
3. What role does art play in Poxl's life, specifically his admiration for Egon Schiele and William Shakespeare? How do you think Poxl's love of the arts shapes Eli's perception of him?
4. How does Poxl's knowledge of his mother's infidelities affect his views of her? How does it affect his views of his father? Do his judgments change after he begins to suspect their fates? How does he feel about the actions he's taken toward them?
5. Do you think Poxl's parents' relationship affected his own relationships with women? How?





6. Who do you think was Poxl's great love? What role did Françoise serve in his life? Glynnis? Victoria? How does each intimate relationship affect subsequent relationships in his life?
7. Eli says himself that he was not drawn to learning about his Jewish heritage as a boy. What about Poxl's stories captures his interest? Was Poxl's wartime experience as a Jewish refugee who fights militarily against the Nazi invasion different than other Jewish experiences you've read before? How?
8. How did you feel about the ending? Would you call it happy?
9. Can a memoir ever be considered strictly nonfiction? Or does autobiographical recollection always possess a level of fiction, regardless of the factual foundation?
10. This novel alternates between two coming-of-age narratives: Eli's reflections and Poxl's memoir, inviting comparisons between both their experiences of adolescence? How were they similar? How did they differ? Do you like novels composed of two different stories or perspectives?
11. Half of the novel takes place in 1940s Europe, and the other half in Boston in the 1980s and '90s. Was there a time period or section that you preferred? Why?
12. How does the fact of SKYLOCK being a book-within-a-book effect your reading? What is your experience of returning to the Eli sections after long periods in Poxl's head?

Want learn more about Daniel Torday?

Visit him online at: www.danieltorday.com

