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Friedlander's journey full of stories needing to be told

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Staff Writer

Both Eva Friedlander and Mickey Goodman smile when the title of their collaborative book, "Nine Lives of a Marriage: A Curious Journey," comes up in conversation. One describes it as "an argument" while the other calls it "a battle," but they're still quite satisfied with how well it suits the work.



Mickey Goodman (left) and Eva Friedlander "took a chance on each other," and the fruit of their labor is "Nine Lives of a Marriage." PHOTO/John McCurdy.

The idea of having "nine lives" applies to not only the physical resilience of Eva and late husband George, both Holocaust survivors, but also to Eva's personal determination to keep her family together years later when George became involved in an affair.

And the "curious journey" – well, that's just what the book takes the reader on as it chronicles a couple who survived the Nazi regime, enjoyed professional success in Italy and the United States and left a legacy of fascinating stories.

"Reliving this by telling the story is equally or almost as painful and traumatic as going through the phases of this episode," Friedlander, now 89 and still living in the Buckhead area while continuing her antiquing career, said. "But I'm glad I did this, happy that the book has been done, written and is out for people to know and to learn about the experience."

The first third of the work tells of man and wife before they were wed and how each survived Germany's sweep through Hungary during World War II. This brings to the reader's attention some shocking facts that can get pushed to the background, considering the proliferation of concentration camp accounts: Hungarian Jews suffered a much faster and perhaps even more devastating Holocaust, with 550,000 of 825,000 perishing within 54 days.

Much more joyful is the second portion, which describes the couple's life in Italy following the war, when George, a chemist, assisted Professor Ernst Boris Chain, one of three men recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize for the discovery and production of penicillin, and Eva worked with the American Joint Distribution Committee to help find homes for the displaced.

"Our life then was very beautiful and romantic," Eva said. "I have very, very pleasant memories and it was professionally rewarding for George and myself as well."

The third and final section details family life in America for the Friedlanders, which while darkened by her husband's infidelity also gave many reasons to celebrate. Eva sharpened her skills in the consulting and appraising businesses while raising children Louis and Lynn (the former today a cosmetic surgeon living in Marietta, the latter a veterinarian based in Denver), and George served Emory University in a research position and then established his own chemical company.

And most critically in Eva's mind, the four remained together as a unit. Whether she eventually left George is for the reader to find out, but regardless, when she reflects on the past, she sees the positives.

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"I took pride in my own accomplishments, despite our difficulties with one another," she said. "We had still accomplished a very brave and commendable feat in coming from the other side of the world, \$200 in our pockets with no stability or family and starting a life and laying roots here."

All of this was shared with Goodman, previously a writer for newspapers and magazines, over two-and-a-half years of meetings. The author had to adjust to the format, composing in first-person and creating 20 chapters of about 3,000 words each when she was used to a more journalistic approach, but she relished the process, all the same.

"There were some wonderful parts and there were some very trying parts; it seemed like, particularly towards the end, that it was never going to all come together," Goodman laughed. "It was interesting, and I would do it all again."

What finally emerges is a hybrid of autobiography and biography, one that subject and scribe alike feel presents many valuable lessons in enjoyable and readable fashion. Those who read these 300 pages will make their own judgments of the people included and their actions, but certainly anyone who picks up "Nine Lives of a Marriage" will find a multitude of musings to take away.

Goodman herself knows what she sees:

"It's a story to me of survival," she said. "Not only did Eva survive the Holocaust, which not many did, but she survived this long ordeal and came out to be this bright, enthusiastic, upbeat woman who is very much a businessperson still."

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