



Book of the Week

***Where the Angels Lived* by Margaret McMullan**

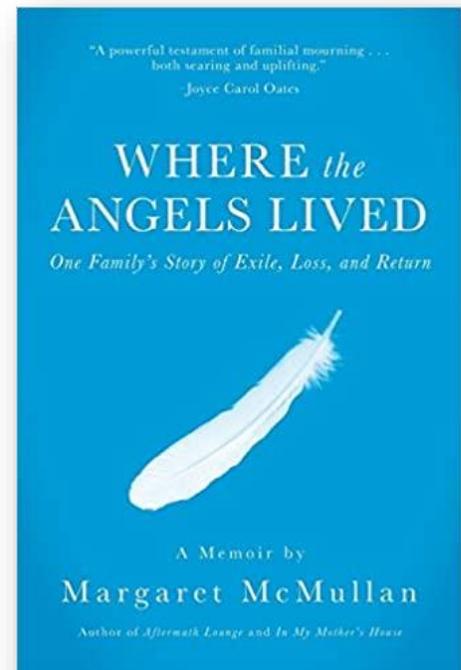
Book Review by Peggy Bates

Please join us when author Margaret McMullan will be a guest on the Starkville Public Library's Books and Authors virtual meeting on Thursday, Feb. 11 at noon. I had the opportunity to meet with her at a virtual book club meeting about her latest work, *Where the Angels Lived*, and was impressed by her in a multitude of ways—her charm, her openness, her ease before a grid of strange faces, and her way of telling her story that captured us all. You don't want to miss her.

Margaret McMullan grew up in Mississippi until their family moved to Chicago when she was still a girl. Her dad, James McMullan, was a Mississippian with established family roots here, but her mother Madeline was exotic, having moved as a child before the onset of WWII from Austria with her professor father and cultured mother. All Margaret really knew of those roots was that her family was Catholic and she was the last of them—the last of the Engel de Janosi line. Until she discovered that she wasn't.

When McMullan was a professor at the University of Evansville in Indiana she was contacted by a distant cousin, another Engel de Janosi who had thought he was the last of the line, and he expanded her heritage to include a Jewish family patriarch from the early 1800's, Adolph Engel of Pecs, Hungary! When Margaret paneled a writing workshop held in Israel, she visited the Holocaust Center there and looked for her family roots. While there were scads of Engels found in the records, there was only one Engel de Janosi, Richard, who perished in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. There was no other information.

The mission of the Holocaust Center is to record the victims and to humanize them as much as possible. These were not numbers; they were people and should not be forgotten. As the only person ever to have checked on Richard Engel de Janosi, Margaret was tasked to fill in the form she was given both to flesh out his life and to honor his memory as the last of the line to remain in Hungary until his death.



Margaret applied for a Fulbright Grant to teach American Southern literature and creative writing for six months at the University of Pecs, one of the oldest in all of Europe. She and her husband Pat O'Connor, who would teach classes there as well, and their 14-year-old son James moved to Pecs and began an experience of a lifetime. As they investigated to uncover their fascinating family story, settling into life in Hungary proved somewhat unsettling, sometimes comic or baffling or menacing, but always an adventure. Hungarians had a recent history of being repressed by stronger forces, the Nazis, and then the Soviets, so caution, mistrust and distortion of what we in the West know of history was rife. Fortunately, the family history uncovered was almost unbelievably rich in character.

Adolph Engel was enterprising and brilliant, building a family fortune from farming, lumber and coal, but also instilling in his children the importance of education, culture, community, philanthropy and the Jewish faith. He had been recognized by Archduke Franz Joseph for all his accomplishments as a stellar Hungarian citizen and "knighted" to become Adolph Engel de Janosi. As times changed, fortunes grew and families expanded to take over different family enterprises throughout Hungary, Austria and France, Richard remained in Pecs running the original family farm, a bachelor dedicated to his quiet life and Jewish heritage.

This was an absolutely fascinating story that leaves you with a feeling of resolution and warmth. Connections are made, family is restored, and friendships are forged. I hope you will read and enjoy *Where the Angels Lived* as I have.

P.S. Incidentally, Madeline McMullan, Margaret's "exotic" mother, taught my Western Civ class at Millsaps College in 1969. It was fabulous. My absolute favorite.

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