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Endorsements & Reviews

“A book of immense courage, written with elegance and great power.”

—Philippe Sands, author of *East West Street*

“The Nazi past casts long shadows and leaves many traumatized to this day. Julie Lindahl digs deep into her own family history to uncover dark secrets dating back to the Holocaust. *The Pendulum* is a deeply engaging and captivating human search for answers, atonement, and closure.”

—Gerald J. Steinacher, University of Nebraska; author of *Nazis on the Run*, winner of the National Jewish Book Award

“An intimate investigation into family truth and lies, shame and grief, anger and indignation. Unfolding like a mystery novel with the very highest stakes, it not only looks with honesty and wisdom at the past but purposefully asks what we're going to make of it for the future. The brilliance and novelty of Lindahl's courageous journey lies in situating her own family history within our collective experience and common pain, thereby reawakening our shared duty to break the silence and *go make things better*.”

—Derek B. Miller, internationally bestselling author of *Norwegian by Night*

“As we travel with Julie Lindahl, we gain a deeper capacity for justice, compassion and commitment to confront today's unthinkable evils. Her investigation and the publication of her excruciating family history has come at a high personal cost—but also with the joy of discovering long-lost relatives and building a global family of survivors and readers. We all are now deeply indebted to her.”

—Piroska Nagy-Mohacsi, London School of Economics

“Julie Lindahl has a kind of courage that is rarely found. Her truthfulness is a rigorous and raw inquiry into history through her own ancestry. She avoids the quick gloss and embraces the hard work of holding her family's intergenerational traumas up to the light. What shines through is difficult, but loving. The story is horrible and yet filled with possibility. While her writing is beautiful and effortless, the subject she carries is anything but. I deeply respect her willingness to face the cultural complexity that lives in her own skin.”

—Nora Bateson, author of *Small Arcs of Larger Circles*; award-winning filmmaker of “An Ecology of Mind”

“An extraordinary meditation on evil and complicity, and on the role future generations play when trying to uncover a perfidious past. With a brilliant prose that often reads as poetry, Julie Lindahl explores and discovers her family's Nazi past. A narrative that is deeply moving as well as informative in its history.”

—Marjorie Agosin, Wellesley College; author of *I Lived in Butterfly Hill*

“A powerful book about good and evil that has become even more important in today's climate of mounting far-right extremism and alternative facts.”

—Hédi Fried, author, psychologist, and Holocaust survivor

“Outstanding insights into the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust—based on the perspective of both perpetrators and their descendants. The book is indispensable for anyone who wants to see the extent and complexity of the lasting influence of war, not only in its own time but also for future generations.”

—Eskil Franck, Uppsala University; former director, the Living History Forum.

“I’ve just carefully re-read *The Pendulum*, in preparation for teaching it in my Holocaust literature class. The book is deeply impressive, as it is relentlessly honest and raises many pertinent questions about the aftermath of trauma, who we are in relation to the past, and the ways in which destructive ideologies and bigotry can affect the next generation and must be dealt with. It gave my students an understanding of shame legacies and how they can be unpacked with sincerity and compassion. My students learned a lot from it and I intend to leave *The Pendulum* on the syllabus in the future.”

—Nancy Harrowitz, Professor of Italian and Jewish Studies, Director of Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Boston University

Author Bio & Contact Information



Julie Lindahl is an author and educator living in Sweden. She writes and speaks widely about her experiences, is a contributor to WBUR Cognoscenti and has been featured on National Public Radio. Julie holds a BA from Wellesley College, an MPhil in International Relations from Oxford University and was a Fulbright Scholar in Frankfurt, Germany.

Raised in ten countries on three continents, she has worked globally as a consultant in the developing world. She is the founder of Stories for Society, a non-profit organization for renewing the art of storytelling for social transformation, which in 2018 launched “New Voices,” an initiative by creatives to innovate learning about war and peace. WBUR 9.0 won the 2018 Edward R. Murrow award for excellence in innovation and the 2018 Associated Press Media Editor’s Award for innovation in storytelling based on a program series featuring her story. In 2018 The American Embassy in Sweden provided a [grant](#) for the launch of her on-line learning program for schools and universities in tandem with the publication of “The Pendulum.”

Download [high resolution press images](#) from author web site. The above image is provided courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Sweden.

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Press Release

The Pendulum

A Granddaughter Searches for her Family's Hidden Nazi Past

Long Description

This powerful memoir traces Brazilian-born American Julie Lindahl's journey to uncover her grandparents' role in the Third Reich as she is driven to understand how and why they became members of Hitler's elite, the SS. Out of the unbearable heart of the story—the unclaimed guilt that devours a family through the generations—emerges an unflinching will to learn the truth. In a remarkable six-year journey through Germany, Poland, Paraguay, and Brazil, Julie uncovers, among many other discoveries, that her grandfather had been a fanatic member of the SS since 1934. During World War II, he was responsible for enslavement and torture, and complicit in murder of the local population on the large estates that he oversaw in occupied Poland, before fleeing to South America to evade a new wave of war-crimes trials. The pendulum used by Julie's grandmother to divine good from bad and true from false becomes a symbol for the elusiveness of truth and morality, but also for the false securities we cling to when we become unmoored from them. As Julie delves deeper into the abyss of her family's secret, discovering history anew, one precarious step at a time, the compassion of strangers is a growing force that transforms her world and the way that she sees her family—and herself.

Short Description

This powerful memoir traces Brazilian-born American Julie Lindahl's journey to uncover her grandparents' role in WWII as she is driven to understand why they became members of Hitler's elite, the SS. Out of the unbearable heart of the story—the unclaimed guilt that devours a family through generations—emerges an unflinching will to learn the truth.

Media

["Beyond Sides of History"](#), an award-winning series by WBUR 9.0 (National Public Radio, Boston)

[Essays](#) at WBUR Cognoscenti

["The Hidden Truth"](#) Wellesley Magazine (Spring 2017)

Sample Author Q&A

Motives

What motivated you to start your research?

- Family relationships asphyxiated by silence and untruths concerning a heavy past.
- I had long sensed that there were links between history and our inability to speak with one another candidly, and had even been forbidden from looking into the past by my father. He asked me to promise him "to look after his grandchildren" after he died, and I sensed that the only way I could keep this promise to him was to break my earlier promise to him never to look into the past.
- A strong sense of shame from an early age as a result of a mother who was frequently upset.
- The conversations throughout my formative and adult years with my grandmother, a woman with whom I shared many interests, but who retained her ideology.
- I was academically trained in 20th century international affairs, particularly the history of the Third Reich and Polish-German relations, and therefore had some idea of how to go about doing the work.

The Journey

Describe the research process. Where and when did you start the work and where did it take you?

- It began in April 2010 at the German Federal Archives in Berlin (The Bundesarchiv) where I was made aware that the archives held approximately 100 pages of documentation about my grandparents providing incontrovertible evidence of their avid participation in the Nazi Party before the takeover of power and in the SS from 1934.
- Thereafter I visited various state, city and national archives in Germany and Poland (the Institute of National Remembrance) where I was provided with further documentation including eyewitness accounts recorded in Poland in 1946, denazification documents and many other pieces of evidence.
- With the assistance of a young Polish archivist I tracked down several families in the west central Polish countryside whose families had suffered under my grandfather's overlordship, including one man who was a local historian.
- Both in Northern Germany and in Poland I discovered the important role that local historians can play in this type of research.
- A grant from Wellesley College (my undergraduate alma mater) allowed me to return to Latin America for the first time in 45 years to research my grandparents' lives there. My interest was in their network and how they found their new home, as well as in learning more about the lives of fled SS in Latin America, about which we know relatively little.

What surprised and/or shocked you most?

- The sight of my grandmother's handwriting, which I recognized from all of the birthday cards she had sent me through the years, in the first tranche of documents from the Bundesarchiv.
- How vivid and consistent the memories were of my grandfather among the eyewitnesses and survivors in Poland: a fanatic with sadistic tendencies. "An unhappy man" and, surprisingly, "a good farmer."
- That seeking forgiveness from the survivors was a fruitless effort, as I had not committed the crimes.

- How difficult it was for people at community level in Schleswig-Holstein to discuss this period of history. The annals of their towns during the Third Reich were sometimes blank, I was passed information about my grandparents in brown paper envelopes, and sometimes even turned away. S-H was an important early base for Hitler in his rise to power and many former SS felt comfortable returning there after the war.
- The discovery of a branch of the family I didn't know existed in Latin America.
- The contrast between the attitude toward former SS and the Nazis in Latin America and in Europe. The Holocaust was far away and to many the SS were to be admired as organized strong men with an ideology that could counter messy democracy and its corruption. This was an environment where it was easy for former SS to live without being judged.
- The way that a journey into one of the darkest periods of human history also became a journey that redeemed humanity for me in all of the many meetings with strangers who shared my values and belief in the need to seek truth, no matter how elusive it may be.

Findings

What did you discover about your grandparents' role in the Third Reich/occupied Poland?

- Learned that my grandparents had been early supporters of Hitler (my grandfather joined the party in December 1931), in contrast to the many who joined after the takeover of power in 1933 for practical reasons. This provided possibilities of quickly gaining access to estates and land, and fulfilling their ambition to become members of the elite.
- My grandfather had departed for occupied Poland in the autumn of 1939, although it is unclear as to exactly when and how. Possibly as a member of a mounted Einsatzgruppen squadron, but in November 1939 was appointed a Special Führer for Landed Estates in East Prussia and Poland with the responsibility with others of transforming west central Poland into the bread basket of the Third Reich. Worked for the Reichsgesellschaft für Landbewirtschaftung, a parastatal under the Ministry of Agriculture. He appears never to have reached a very high rank in the military wing of the SS (Scharführer – squadron leader), rather had influence over many through his functional role in the civilian SS behind the lines. His role in agriculture sounded benign, but he was the law on his estates (under a law passed by Himmler early in the war) and it was brutal. Engaged in torture and complicit in deportation and murder of the Polish landowners. This illustrates that way that the racial war impacted Poles and the way that it infiltrated every area of life, including a sector that sounded as benign as agriculture.
- My grandmother was an active and enthusiastic member of the German Women's Association (responsible for maternal care and education) and the NSV (Nazi welfare association which, among other things, redistributed the belongings of people who had been sent to the concentration camps).

What were the circumstances of their departure for Brazil in 1960?

- Contrary to what I had been told in my formative years, I found that my grandparents had left the Federal Republic in December 1960 as a result of mounting pressure and fear that they might be brought to justice. The prospect of the Eichmann trial sent shock waves through former SS circles; a new wave of war crimes trials had commenced in 1958 as Chancellor Adenauer came under pressure from the US, Israel and East Germany (which accused the west of being a continuation of the fascist state in thin disguise); and a Federal Prosecutor's Office for prosecuting war crimes was opened in Ludwigsburg in 1958. There is also the possibility, floated only as a theory in the book, that people like my grandfather, overt Nazis, became inconvenient eyesores under the Federal Republic when their bosses during the Third Reich came into

positions of high office in the Federal Republic. My grandfather's boss during the occupation eventually became a Minister in the Adenauer cabinet.

- There may have been another 'push' factor, such as local rivalry with another former SS officer who publicly outed my grandfather for alleged crimes in the East, saying he would never stand under the same roof with such a man. This caused business problems for my grandparents, who ran a hunting lodge and hotel. They sent their oldest child and only son ahead of them to scout out a place for them to live in Brazil, aided by contact with another fled former SS, who had visited their hunting hotel, already living in Brazil. They sold the property at a fraction of the price that it was worth, raising suspicions in the local community of why they were suddenly leaving.

What discoveries did you make about their journey to Brazil and their lives there?

- They left Hamburg on a French liner and spent three weeks on a ship which they shared with various people, including Jews who wanted to leave Europe for a new life.
- They took up permanent residence as quickly as they could and my grandfather never intended to return.
- They stayed with their contact in a German town outside of São Paulo called San Pedro for eight months before moving into the interior of the Mato Grosso do Sul, near the Paraguayan border. A wild place, not suitable for two people in ill health.
- My grandfather was seen as a model estate owner by the Governor of Mato Grosso, Filinto Müller, who had visited the Third Reich on the invitation of Himmler in 1937.
- He never had to confront the consequences of his choices and rather remained committed to his ideology and the righteousness of the idea of Lebensraum. He reread Paul Carell's (revisionist) account of Operation Barbarossa countless times.

Was your grandfather ever pursued or prosecuted for war crimes?

- Initially the Polish authorities in one area of west central Poland sought his extradition with two other Nazis. After the war, the charges appear to have been dropped by a local court in the last place where my grandfather was stationed on the grounds that they could not find sufficient evidence against him. Information from other areas where he had been stationed was not available, and as it became clear the war was being lost he toned down his behaviour, concerned about his own survival. Charges from crimes committed in other areas were resubmitted to the German authorities later on.
- He stayed out of sight until 1947 when he presented himself for denazification in order to purchase property. The timing of his emergence coincides with the end of extraditions to the East by the Allies, as the Cold War became a greater concern.
- Like many SS, he was able to resume a normal life and even fraternize and reminisce with former colleagues on hunting weekends at his hotel.
- While there is no evidence that he was prosecuted in the late fifties, clearly he had done things in the East that made the ever-reducing tolerance for people like him feel threatening.
- To provide some context: only six of the thousands of former SS and Nazis who escaped to Brazil were ever prosecuted, and although his life in Brazil became less comfortable as the cause of human rights advanced in the world, he seemed never to be in danger of being captured or extradited.

Reverberations

What are the consequences of looking at such a difficult family past for you?

- It has changed my perspectives about myself, my family and the world around me.
- I realize the extent to which my own self-perception was formed by this secret. The meeting with my Paraguayan cousins who suffered from a form of the same shame syndrome was important in this regard. Today shame has been transformed into responsibility for me, mainly as a result of meetings with the eyewitnesses and victims. To me this highlights the importance of facing the past in a transformational perspective, i.e. how do we transform our knowledge of the past into a force powerful enough to take another path?
- "The Pendulum" attempts to provide explanations for why all of the actors behaved as they did. For instance, I shed light on the process by which my grandparents became radicalized. This in no way excuses their actions, but sheds light on how people become extremists. I also attempt to illuminate the impossibility of the choices their children were confronted with, and how difficult and confusing it was for that first generation to decide how to handle their parents' legacies.
- The dynamics and role of unclaimed guilt in forming our families and communities is something that I think we need to consider in supporting families fleeing war today. One of the characters in the book says that: "It is where we do not seek truth that unclaimed guilt does its unholy mischief." This is my experience.
- I have become a democracy activist and educator, both in the US and in Sweden, as I realize from immersing myself in this history how precarious our situation is today. I am not quite sure what "closure" is, as the responsibility I feel for what is happening today is endless.

What are the reactions of family?

- Mixed reactions, largely divided along generational lines.

Relevance

Why did you write this book?

- I am a storyteller and writing is the way I work through all of my experiences. It was unbearable not to write it. Still, it is one thing to pursue a story like this for personal reasons, and quite another to write a book about it. Many times I put the manuscript away, and many times it changed.
- When I began to notice patterns in the world that likened my grandparents' time — a marriage of greed and tribalism in which the idea of truth is the first thing to be sacrificed — we are in danger of losing our inner and outer freedom if we do not appreciate the similarities. As a result, I felt a responsibility to write and publish the work.
- I was already out speaking and printed an abridged version to accompany me on speaking engagements. This quickly found its way into schools in the U.S.

Were there any reasons not to write/publish this book?

- All along I have been concerned about the sensitivities of family. Yet, it has not helped our family to disguise this past, rather the reverse.
- There is also the issue of living with this story in public, which isn't easy. I have to expect quite different reactions, not all of them positive.
- There is always the problem of attempting to piece together history without having been there, but I address this by revealing what I know as I discover it, and being clear that the puzzle is never complete.

- For all of these reasons, as well as their desire to protect me, several of my friends urged me not to become buried in this history, and, in some cases, leave it entirely alone. There is a natural resistance in our society to looking over our shoulders. It is a taboo in our legends (The Bible, Greek mythology, for example).

Considering your experiences, what does history mean to you?

- History is a web of interactions that is alive in each of us, rather than something distant in history books. Each of us is a receptacle of history. The question is what we do with what we are carrying. Reference the words on the home page of my web site:

"Throughout time, many have emphasized the importance of living in the now. Being present has become one of the mantras of our distracted age. Yet, the experience of this very moment is deeply informed by the past. To see the present for what it is we must face its DNA in both our personal and social histories as truthfully as possible. Only then will we be able to experience what we see with some clarity, resist simplifying, know our contradictions and tread gently as we find our way forward.

The future begins with the story we tell in this moment. The quality and force of that story will be measured by its authenticity and the conviction we can bring to telling it. Each voice is alone and yet a part of that universal voice with all of its joy, anger and non-uniformity. To envision the future is to listen to the many voices and always remember that they are that complex and unquantifiable unity."

What other themes relevant to the times we are living in do you see emerging from this work?

- What does it do to us and to our descendants to claim that the realities of our family pasts and their legacies are a myth? How does it affect us and our society? This is a larger question in times when people are prepared to defend untruths that are and will do us very great harm into the future.
- There is the question of what the truth is and whether one can ever really discover it as someone who did not live in that time. I would be the first to admit that my own research raises very many questions for me. There are many gaps, things I cannot answer, that I have left open for the reader to see. These gaps are perhaps the reason we are so afraid of venturing down the path of truth. We like to have control over things, "know" what we are talking about. But really, we can only try to know, do our best to see, even if there are things that don't fit with our 'picture,' and admit that we always come up with questions that we might never be able to answer. I found this to be particularly true when it came to knowing whether my grandparents ever felt any remorse. It also applies to knowing exactly what my grandparents did during the war. I don't know it all - I can only provide a broad brush look based on certain evidence I gathered.
- The issue of forgiveness is one that surrounds this work and the question is whether I should seek forgiveness. But then the question I ask myself is from whom? One of my grandfather's victims pointed out that this was not an appropriate pursuit for me as he could not forgive me for things I had not done. In his very wise response I saw what it was I should be seeking, at least from the people my grandparents' wronged, and that was the fleeting chance that we would be able to find compassion for one another, together, in a quiet, non-violent space, where we would forge something new, defeat old barriers, hatreds and tribalism.

Book Title

What is the significance of the pendulum in the title?

- My grandmother used a pendulum to divine right from wrong, good from bad, true from false. She wanted me to have a pendulum, as she saw it as an indispensable item in one's life. In an early chapter of the book, she hangs it over a photograph of her long-lost son to decide whether he is alive or not. Because it spins counter-clockwise, she decides that he must be dead (which, as I discovered through my research, proved to be incorrect). I decided early on that I didn't want such an object in my life, because it seemed to me to be a crutch for someone who had become unmoored from truth, ethics and morals. In order to pursue her ideology, which she held fast to throughout life, the idea of truth had to be sacrificed. At some point, the lies became her reality, and there was no turning back to the idea of truth. Thus, all that was left was the pendulum.
- The pendulum is also a symbol for my own state of mind during this journey. Should I let past be past and avoid opening up old family wounds, or should I try to seek the truth? My grandmother once said that I had no business looking into the past, it didn't belong to me. I swung between the idea that I could never really understand what happened in my family's past because I hadn't been there, and a feeling of responsibility about facing history.