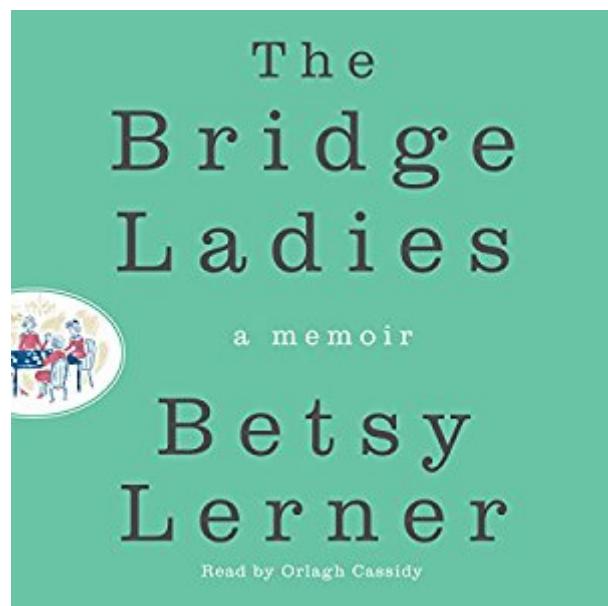


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The Bridge Ladies: A Memoir



Synopsis

A 50-year-old bridge game provides an unexpected way to cross the generational divide between a daughter and her mother. Betsy Lerner takes us on a powerfully personal literary journey where we learn a little about bridge and a lot about life. After a lifetime defining herself in contrast to her mother's "don't ask, don't tell" generation, Lerner finds herself back in her childhood home, not five miles from the mother she spent decades avoiding. When Roz needs help after surgery, it falls to Betsy to take care of her. She expected a week of tense civility; what she gets instead are the Bridge Ladies. Impressed by their loyalty, she sees something her generation lacks. Facebook is great, but it won't deliver a pot roast. Tentatively at first, Betsy becomes a regular at her mother's Monday bridge club. Through her friendships with the ladies, she is finally able to face years of misunderstandings and family tragedy, the bridge table becoming the common ground she and Roz never had. By turns darkly funny and deeply moving, *The Bridge Ladies* is the unforgettable story of a hard-won - but never-too-late - bond between mother and daughter.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Betsy Lerner (author of "Forest for the Trees," and "Food and Loathing") was a little girl, the "Bridge Ladies," a group of suburban Jewish women in Connecticut who played the game regularly at her mother's house were a source of glamour, though as a teen, she later dismissed them as square and disconnected from the growing feminist movement. Years later with a husband and daughter of her own, Betsy moved back to her parents' area, first in order to help her father who had a stroke. Later, in the winter of 2013, she came to the aid of her mother, who was recovering from

surgery, and discovered that the Bridge ladies, were still a fixture, bringing food and meeting for games about fifty years later. To her surprise, after asking to sit in on a game, Betsy developed an interest in the game and began to take lessons. She also became interested in the five women's lives and began to interview them as well, a process which would wind up lasting almost three years (and culminate with this memoir). Her journey would take her to places like the Manhattan Bridge Club (where she found the teachers varied greatly in their effectiveness and humility), into therapy to help her understand the friction in her relationship with her own mother, and into five remarkable octogenarians': Rhoda, Bette, Bea, Jackie and Roz's lives. At first, Betsy, a literary agent without a knack for numbers found mastering bridge tricky but was aided when a teacher recommended that she think of playing Bridge as telling a story. Eventually, she began to fill in on occasion at the Bridge table for her mother's group. She also began discovering that her ideas of who the Bridge ladies were weren't quite accurate to say the least.

Betsy Lerner's relationship with her mother was always fraught, from the time when, as a pot-smoking rebellious teenager, she balked at her mother's goals for her: marriage to a nice Jewish man, followed by children. Decades later, married and with a daughter, Lerner is living close to her widowed octogenarian mother in New Haven, and is married with a daughter, but their relationship is still strained: her mother still rolls her eyes at everything from Lerner's clothing choices to the fact that a rug in her household is fraying at its edges. Could joining in at the fringes of her mother's 50-year-old bridge game -- a circle of Jewish matrons whom Lerner has watched mature and grow old, and whose children she grew up alongside in Connecticut -- give her insight into her mother and her own generation? And is there a wider lesson here for Lerner's readers? The answer to the first is yes, perhaps -- or at least, there is a measure of peace to be found for the restless Lerner who seems to struggle constantly with the idea that these women, who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s, might have priorities so very different from her own. Why didn't they yearn for more? More from a marriage? More of a personal life? More open exchanges with their friends in their weekly bridge games? These are questions she keeps returning to in her conversations with each of these women, individually and collectively, and in her own ruminations. The women, for their part, deal with her graciously; Lerner sometimes sounds like the irritating adolescent still struggling to define herself against her elders. Lerner also sets out to study the game of Bridge itself -- to immerse herself in its rules and strategy, with decidedly uneven results.

Betsy Lerner's "The Bridge Ladies" • entertainingly and movingly traces the long-standing

friendship of five Jewish women, Roz, Rhoda, Bea, Betty, and Jackie, who have been playing bridge together for over fifty years. Lerner frequently quarrels with her mother, Roz, who criticizes her daughter's appearance, work habits, and housekeeping ("We circled each other like wary boxers."). Partly to heal the rift with her mother, Betsy decides to spend three years with the Bridge Ladies to find out what makes them tick. The author takes bridge lessons, interviews each member of the Bridge Club, and in the process, opens up to Roz who, in turn, reveals her innermost thoughts to Betsy. Bridge is not just a card game. It is also a metaphor for the importance of communication, the ties that bind us, and the necessity of playing the hand you are dealt. Lerner believes that octogenarians like her mother are part of "the silent generation" in contrast to her own "tell-all generation." Betsy notes that the Bridge Ladies are not particularly affectionate or demonstrative; refuse to wallow in self-pity; and are tactful enough to keep quiet about sensitive matters. "The Bridge Ladies" is unsentimental, powerful, and evocative. Lerner beautifully captures the experiences of many young couples who married in the fifties and stayed together for the long haul. Roz and her peers started out with little money, but they married, had kids, and eventually saved enough to buy nice homes. Even if they were overwhelmed, depressed, and frustrated at times, they soldiered on and rarely looked back with regret at what might have been.

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