



# A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France

*Miranda Richmond Mouillot*

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**A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France** Miranda Richmond Mouillot  
**A young woman moves across an ocean to uncover the truth about her grandparents' mysterious estrangement and pieces together the extraordinary story of their wartime experiences**

In 1948, after surviving World War II by escaping Nazi-occupied France for refugee camps in Switzerland, Miranda's grandparents, Anna and Armand, bought an old stone house in a remote, picturesque village in the South of France. Five years later, Anna packed her bags and walked out on Armand, taking the typewriter and their children. Aside from one brief encounter, the two never saw or spoke to each other again, never remarried, and never revealed what had divided them forever.

*A Fifty-Year Silence* is the deeply involving account of Miranda Richmond Mouillot's journey to find out what happened between her grandmother, a physician, and her grandfather, an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials, who refused to utter his wife's name aloud after she left him. To discover the roots of their embittered and entrenched silence, Miranda abandons her plans for the future and moves to their stone house, now a crumbling ruin; immerses herself in letters, archival materials, and secondary sources; and teases stories out of her reticent, and declining, grandparents. As she reconstructs how Anna and Armand braved overwhelming odds and how the knowledge her grandfather acquired at Nuremberg destroyed their relationship, Miranda wrestles with the legacy of trauma, the burden of history, and the complexities of memory. She also finds herself learning how not only to survive but to thrive--making a home in the village and falling in love.

With warmth, humor, and rich, evocative details that bring her grandparents' outsize characters and their daily struggles vividly to life, *A Fifty-Year Silence* is a heartbreakingly uplifting love story spanning two continents and three generations.

## A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France Details

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Miranda Richmond Mouillot**

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# From Reader Review A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France for online ebook

## Heidi says

Three and a half stars: A book that is more about the author's personal journey than her grandparents.

Miranda realizes that time is running for her aging grandparents. Two amazing Holocaust survivors who endured unspeakable horror and sadness. After the war, her grandfather served as an interpreter during the Nuremberg Trials, and something occurred during that time that drove her grandparents apart. Miranda's grandmother packed up her two children and left him, and the two never spoke again. For years, the family has wondered what happened to cause them never to see one another or speak again. Now it is up to Miranda to try and learn the truth before it is too late.

### What I Liked

\*I was immediately drawn to the author's grandparents. They are the type of people I would love to meet in real life, to hear their amazing stories of survival firsthand. Miranda's grandmother, Anna, was a physician in 1930's Europe, who due to miraculous luck, evaded capture by the Nazis several times. Just the fact that she was a doctor in this era was amazing, but then to hear her story of escape was enthralling. Armand as well was a man who survived great heart ache, as he lost his entire family in Auschwitz. I can't even imagine the horrors he had to listen to during his time serving at the Nuremberg Trials. I thought both of these people were fascinating and I found that I wanted more of both their stories.

\*It was heartbreaking to think of how this family was torn apart by the war, and then the turmoil that followed as Anna and Armand split up. I was completely invested in learning the truth about why and how they split.

Miranda interweaves her own story in between her grandparents experiences. She tells of her trip to France, and finding the little house her grandparents bought, and how she endeavored to restore it and ultimately finds her heart. I appreciated that she realized the importance of preserving her grandparents history as they grew older. Such a rich legacy, and she made me think about all the stories that have been lost.

\*This is an interesting and revealing tale about how people endured the holocaust. The story of how her grandparents walked over the freezing mountain and spent the night huddled in an outhouse is unforgettable. I liked reading the stories of these brave people.

\*I loved that the author included portions of letters from her grandmother that detailed the events in her own words.

### And The Not So Much:

\*The biggest issue I had was that the book reads like a diary and it isn't tightly written or cohesive. You get a lot of the author's personal journey which was interesting, but I found that I was much more invested in the history of her grandparents. The story is all over the place. I wished that it was better laid out.

\*I was disappointed that after all the buildup regarding the reason for the split and the fifty years silence ended in a fizzle. I was expecting some big revelation from one of the grandparents, but it doesn't really happen. Instead I got the author's conjectures on why they split, but nothing concrete. I couldn't believe that after all the time and heartache that no one in the family pressed the grandparents for the truth. How could you not want to understand what happened? Why didn't Miranda's mother and uncle step up? What were their feelings on their parents? What kind of relationship did they have with their parents? There was so much left out that I wanted to know.

\*There is this big focus regarding Miranda restoring the little house that her grandparents owned in France, but then the story line drops. What happened to the house?

\*Finally, I was upset that I didn't learn what happened to her grandfather. Did he pass away after she finished

the book? There is no mention as to his health or what happened to him.

\*I loved the letters and such included in her grandmother's voice, but at times they were a touch confusing, and there were terms I was unfamiliar with. I wish Miranda had taken the time to clarify some of these things.

A Fifty Year Silence was an interesting and informative story about two survivors of the holocaust who suffer unspeakable horrors that damage them forever. What happened to drive them apart? I enjoyed getting to know Anna and Armand and hearing their stories. I only wished there was more.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own and I was not compensated for this review.

Posted@Rainy Day Ramblings.

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### **Janet says**

This is the story Miranda knew about the life of her grandparents. They met, married, had two children, separated, never met or spoke again. Miranda is one of the last links left between them and is compelled to find out more of their history. She wants to understand how they could have survived so much together only to retreat into fifty years of silence. She researches their experiences as Jewish refugees in war torn World War II Europe, their marriage at the end of the war, her grandfather's service as an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. By piecing together and telling their story, Miranda Richmond Mouillot gives her grandparents the ultimate tribute: she makes them unforgettable.

A moving examination of love, chance, family, belonging and memory. A great choice for book clubs.

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### **Susan says**

This is a very moving memoir and is the personal story of both author, Miranda Richmond Mouillot, and that of her grandparents – Anna and Armand. Miranda was the only grandchild of Anna and Armand. Although her parents were divorced, she was close to both her mother and her father and her step-parents. However, although her childhood was happy and she felt loved, she was also unsettled by conversations and snippets which she hardly recalled hearing, but which affected her. Her beloved grandmother, who lived next door, was a holocaust survivor , as was her grandfather, who she became closer to when slightly older. However, she was aware of her grandmother's keeping things, "just in case," and Miranda herself dreamt of flight and the fear of losing her home. She was also always aware that her grandparents – joyful, outgoing Anna and grumpy, difficult Armand – were estranged. In fact, they had not spoken for many years –ever since Anna left their house in France with her two children and a typewriter...

In this book we follow Miranda's discovery of her grandparent's story. Her gradual closeness to her grandfather and how she visits the house he shared with Anna in Alba, in the South of France. Miranda falls in love with the house and is devastated when Armand announces he wants to sell it. However, difficulties arise when his wish means that he needs Anna's agreement. Miranda travels back to France with her eighty seven year old grandmother and, as events unfold, she decides she needs to discover what happened between

her grandparents which led to a silence of over fifty years between them. During her research, both Anna and Armand become elderly and frail. Miranda's life changes and she comes to terms with both her grandparent's past and their legacy. This is a lovely read, which is incredibly moving and you really feel the weight of history as the book unfolds. Miranda writes of her grandparents with deep love and I feel grateful that she shared her story, which is wonderfully told. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publishers, via NetGalley, for review.

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### **Bridget says**

I could not put this book down from the moment I received my advanced reader copy and am only sad I cannot purchase a copy yet to send to my mother. Part mystery, part memoir, "a Fifty Year Silence" takes the author on a journey to France to discover what caused the rift between her grandparents after WWII. During Mouillot's search I became more and more interested to an obsessive degree needing to know what happened to these people and as such, could not put the book down.

The book makes you journey this couple's life and story in reverse and along the way, the author creates her own life guided by her grandparent's past. I do not want to give too much of the story away, but I was as frustrated with Anna and Armand's unwillingness to speak of the past as the author and heartbroken when I found out what had happened to each of them during the war. I was particularly struck by Armand's time as an interpreter at the Nuremberg trials and cried for the last twenty pages or so.

This book 5 stars across the board, and opened my eyes to the fact that sometimes you don't need to know the whole truth to be effected by it. five stars.

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### **Diane S ? says**

3.5 A search by a grand-daughter for the truth of the relationship between her grandparents who have not talked about or to each other for fifty years. War time experiences have left scars for many so it is not surprising that this story is filled with anguish, confusion and sadness but it is also written with a great deal of love. Yet, it was still confusing to me at times, didn't understand the motivation of her grandparents, nor why her grandmother would not tell her story nor explain even when directly asked. Her grandfather I understood a little more, as a translator for the Nuremberg trials and as a son who lost his parents in Auschwitz, he was I believe bitterly scarred. The grandmother, I believe did not want to look back and the grandfather was unable to look forward.

Still I applaud the author, her journey to know her grandparents as individual people not just family members. Her love of the little house in the south of France, the care she took of her grandfather and this book she wrote to honor their lives. Loved the pictures, they always add so much to a book, and enjoyed reading the end, which was a conversation with the author. This was an interesting book, but there were still many things I didn't understand.

ARC from librarything.

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## **Jim says**

This book chronicles a woman's attempt to discover the reason behind her grandparents' mysterious and vindictive estrangement shortly after WWII. The author set the hook early: the first 5 chapters were engrossing. Sadly, I rapidly lost interest after that. It's not that the book is poorly written...the author is an educated woman and her writing reflects this...but I believe that the story peters out due to lack of information. The story becomes more about the author than the grandparents, which is a pity because, (meaning no disrespect) the grandparents were far more interesting. Both survived WWII Europe; the grandmother went on to become a physician and the grandfather was a translator at the Nuremberg trials. Now *that* would have been a story!

Ms Richmond-Maillot makes much of her opinion that her grandparents were holocaust survivors, a bandwagon everyone seems to jump on if the least chance presents itself. Maybe she's right: both felt the need to flee France and it is likely that they would have been given a one-way ticket to Auschwitz if they were captured. Neither spent any time in a concentration camp or had a particularly close call insofar as apprehension was concerned. To me, they are holocaust survivors the same way my parents were holocaust survivors: they were all alive during WWII and none of them were captured by Nazis. OK, I trivialize perhaps but to me a holocaust survivor is someone who was rescued or escaped from a concentration camp, someone who is in real and immediate peril. The author lets the reader know that there were plenty of hardships, but doesn't create in the reader that sense of urgency and peril.

In short, the book suffers from lack of data. The writer found scant information in records and seems to have been reluctant to interview her grandparents extensively about their past. What is left is speculation, with frequent use of phrases like "would have" and "it is likely". She might as well have written "I've got nuthin' here." She invents entire dialogues for the subjects. In my opinion, this makes the book a bit dodgy as far as history is concerned; it's at least part fabrication. But hey, as the author's own personal love story, the book isn't bad at all.

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## **Marla Mutch says**

There is so much about this book that falls into my no, don't read it list, it is a serious memoir, it circles around and around the horrors of the Holocaust, one of the main characters is a really difficult, if not down right nasty, and yet I loved it. I even grew to love the mean guy. This book is so thoughtful, loving, and forgiving that I just wept at the end.

No one's family is perfect and Miranda Richmond Mouillot's search for the unspoken reasons her family has the flaws, quirks and supreme gifts it has was a blessing to follow. She chronicles her self doubts, her desire to get it right and acknowledges that there really is no way to get it all down on paper. We really can't get to the true heart of anyone and the whys of them, and especially when such a cataclysmic event as the holocaust blows through her family, records are lost, events converge, people forget, sometimes on purpose, memory can be the enemy of well being. One of the most poignant moments in the book is when her Grandfather is losing his memories and must be put in care and his terror of having been arrested, searched, and his possessions removed, his fears of not knowing who has taken him and where he is, and the compassion of the caretakers when Miranda apologizes for her Grandfather's anger and name calling, "It's pretty common for people with painful war trauma to lose their memory, That and marriages gone bad."

There is a lot to learn here, and it presented in a thoughtful, kind way. How her Grandparents survived the war (barely), how they used their skills to pick up life again and thrive after the war ended, her Grandmother

a physician, who cared for so many and kept so many alive, and her brilliant Grandfather, who ended the War as a translator at the Nuremberg Trials, listening, and repeating the horrors of the camps, where his whole family disappeared into. Unfortunately their marriage didn't survive, but the family they made did. I am grateful I got to know the force of nature that was Anna, and the brilliant, wounded Armand.

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### **Ronald Roseborough says**

A good book, stunning in it's revelation of the human tragedy. Miranda Richmond Mouillot's maternal grandparents haven't spoken to each other for fifty years. The lure of this enigma draws the author inexorably into the search for answers. At some point surely, they must have loved one another. Why else marry and eventually give birth to Miranda's mother, Angele. Both grandparents, Anna and Armand, found themselves Jewish refugees in Nazi occupied France during World war II. After evading capture and deportation to a concentration camp, the couple sought sanctuary in neutral Switzerland. Their marriage in 1944, did not work for very long. After the war, Anna would pursue her medical studies and practice apart from Armand. He found work as an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials in Germany where many of the leading Nazis were brought to justice. Miranda is mesmerized by the fact that her grandfather, after enduring so much together with her grandmother during the war, cannot even hear Anna's name without flying into a rage. Traveling to France, Miranda settles into an old medieval stone house that her grandmother, Anna, bought after leaving her husband. The ramshackle house reflects the current state of the relationship between Anna and Armand. Miranda resolves to rescue not only the house, but perhaps the relationship as well. If nothing else, she determines to solve the riddle of her grandparents breakup. Much heart warming emotion and love are evident in this book. It is well worth reading. This book provided for review by Crown Publishers.

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### **Chrissie says**

When I began the book I loved it, but then it becomes confusing because it goes in all different directions. What is the real purpose of the book? Are we being given a holocaust story or are we being given a philosophical message on how one should live life? Or is it about the difficult job interpreters' shoulder? Who is the book really about? The author or her grandparents? When I finished the book I was left with too many questions and incongruities. Also, even the telling of the known facts, after the author's extensive research, is confusing. Although it is important to live your life forward rather than dwelling in the past, if you spend hours following a person's life in a book it isn't enough to be told the past doesn't matter anyway. Maybe not for the author or as a philosophical question, but for the reader it does matter. When I stop and think of what I am told more and more questions arise. Here is one huge problem: It does not make sense to me that (view spoiler) And I must add that even before I began the book I was quite sure where the problem lay between the grandparents. It is all kind of obvious.

But let me tell you what I loved in the beginning. I was thoroughly intrigued by the two grandparents, both of them. Both were very different from each other. I loved how the grandmother expressed herself. The author too. I felt immediately that the grandfather was hurt, and I wanted to know why. However, as the details of what happened are untangled the theme becomes more a mystery to be solved than the interesting people themselves. It became more what happened than who they were. Back to the positive. I loved the description of provincial life and places in France. I could see the village in my mind's eye. All of this was genuinely described. It shows that the author knew what she was describing. I love French provincial life. It

makes me all mushy and sentimental. I want to hop in a car and go there.

The author is herself an interpreter. She knows French as well as English and it was a delight to hear her speak..... as the French really do speak. Lovely French. (Don't worry; the French is also translated.) Few authors can read their own books as well as they can write them, but this author did an excellent job narrating her own book. She used one intonation for her grandmother, another for her grandfather and of course she tells her own story too. I felt that her closeness to her grandparents could be heard through the narration. It was very well done.

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### **Nonie says**

I am fortunate to have received A Fifty Year Silence from a Goodreads Giveaway.

Miranda is on a journey to find the reason her grandparents didn't speak for Fifty Years. She writes beautifully. Every word flows. Her writing is deep, but very easy reading.

I was so touched by the profound love she had with her grandmother Anna and her gentleness with her grandfather Armand when he started to have some memory problems.

This book shows how the Holocaust can have an effect for generations in a family. It's also about strength, love, letting go and finding yourself.

Wonderful book.

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### **Lisa Hall says**

This is a book I really, really wanted to like. It is right up my alley in a lot of ways. A young girl is curious about her heritage and her family history - a mystery of why her grandparents quit speaking 50 years prior. There is travel, there is love, there is self discovery. A lot of promise in the book jacket and first couple chapters.

The problem with this book is two fold. The key is that it presents it self as a mystery to be resolved, the source of the silence. The author gathers bits and clues, from family letters to discussions (which are more like dances) with her grandparents, to archives in France and other places, she speculates, but the mystery is never solved. The reader, if said reader is invested at all, is totally failed by the lack of closure. Some may dig the "Ah, well, it is the exploring of the mystery not the solving" line of thought, but it drives me crazy!

The second problem is the book does not really know what it wants to be. The mystery book would have been great, with a better mystery. The self discovery book would have been great, with some introspection in regards to her heritage. The love story would have been great, with some development of why she fell in love and what made her/Julian special. The story of her moving to a new country and rehabbing her family property would have been great, if she had actually settled there and finished the rehab. So many genres were hinted at, yet none embraced.

I suspect this author was very busy living an interesting life of travel, love, marriage, child birth, and realized she needed to throw something together to justify the grants that funded her adventure.

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### **Renee says**

A Fifty Year Silence embodies the rare triple achievement of telling a compelling story in beautiful language, while offering profound insights into the human condition. The author's quest to explain her grandparents' half-century estrangement leads her not only through the labyrinth of their gripping wartime escape from Nazi-occupied France and its aftermath but also to an exploration of her own lifelong deep psychic entanglement with her family's past. This beautifully-told double investigation gives the reader a gripping detective story and a subtle psychological (and spiritual) bildungsroman.

Mouillot writes in rich, vivid language studded with images so poetic that several times I stopped to reread them. Her fascinating, unforgettable characters are drawn with almost novelistic subtlety and depth, and she seamlessly interweaves the two compelling plots of wartime adventure and struggle with contemporary self-discovery.

Through this bifurcated tale, Mouillot addresses the tension between silence and secrets and the legacy of collective memory. The reader travels with her to explore silence as a defense, a comfort, and finally a burden. Simultaneously, we discern that memory, with all its potential dangers, ultimately is the vehicle for self-definition and liberation.

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### **Aisling says**

I promised myself no more memoirs but made an exception because the description of this one sounded close enough to a mystery that I felt I would be propelled through any unnecessary navel gazing. I am very glad I did. That's not to say this is perfect; the 'mystery' is never 100% solved (the author does make a good case for her assumption/conclusions). But when an author can write you will follow them anywhere. This book is less about the mystery than it is about a glimpse into WW2, refugee camps, Nazis, family dynamics, and the author's journey in researching and learning. This was an extremely well written book.

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### **Lindsay - Traveling Sister says**

4 stars!

This book revolves around the author, Miranda Richmond Mouillot's, search to discover the details of her estranged grandparents past. Through her journey, she discovers many hidden secrets pertaining to her grandparents marriage and masked details surrounding how they escaped Nazi-occupied France and ended up in separate refugee camps. It is an eye-opening and heartfelt account of a family's history being pieced together generations after Holocaust devastation.

I fell completely in love with Miranda's grandparents, especially her beloved grandmother. Miranda's separate but strong relationship with each grandparent was a unique and very special bond that largely shaped her childhood and adult life.

I recommend this to anyone who enjoys WWII stories. It is a unique, intriguing and well-written true account of a family's legacy being pieced together decades later by a loved one hoping to not forget.

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## **Lady Fancifull says**

Simply, I loved this book, though it took me quite some time to realise that.

Miranda Richmond Mouillot, an American woman whose maternal grandparents were Jews living in France at the time of the Second World War, was driven to discover the truth about the effects of that devastating time on her grandparents, individually, and on their relationship

Her grandparents had a seemingly rather unusual story : they met, at some point in the 40s, as two very different people, trying to make sense of themselves in a time and place without sense. Anna was a doctor, specialising in lung medicine. Armand did not have such a clear vocation, although later he was an interpreter at the Nuremberg trials (he spoke German as well as French) More specifically he was one of the interpreters and translators involved in translating Goering's spoken testimony.

At some earlier point, as part of a group of Jews trying to stay a step ahead of the Nazi occupation of France, the two met. Actually, they seem to have met, lost contact and made contact on a few occasions. It is assumed that they fell in love. They certainly married and had two children. And at some point bought a house in Alba-la-Romaine. However, something hidden, not addressed by either, some family secret, happened in that marriage, and after a very short period Anna left France with her children, and the two never spoke to each other again, though certainly Anna's daughter, Miranda's mother, and Miranda herself, stayed in contact with both of them. Armand moved to Switzerland. Armand particularly would neither speak to, nor about, Anna. Mention of her threw him into cold rages

Miranda needed to understand what had happened in her family, but for more than purely individual reasons.

The book is her quest, through visits and conversations with her beloved grandmother and her more distant, erratic grandfather, to get to the narrative of those lives – and the lives of others, in that time. Through her own experience as the grandchild of European Jews, she shows how the dark events of those times still continue a presence handed down to later generations.

The book is fascinating as a piece of investigation, but is much more than that. There is the objective truth which might be provided by records and the like, and then there are the personal stories, the memories which overlay the stories, and indeed may come to feel more real than what may be indicated by records. There is something also, mysterious, some sort of 'collective unconscious'. For example, Miranda's potent, overwhelming response to the sight of the dilapidated, decaying, neglected house her grandparents had bought half a century earlier – her sense of coming home.

I'm not revealing any of the rather complex personal stories which Miranda found, as answers to her quest, as that is the reader's journey to make. There is also much that she failed to discover, and the failures, the not-knowns, became in the end as potent as what was known, in terms of what the whole process of finding precise causes and effects to her family mystery. Indeed the mystery of that time, goes wider than purely the narrative , or attempt at a narrative, of one particular family; so much of what happened in Europe at that time still seems beyond any rational comprehension

Mouillot writes very well – and, at times, but not too often, she writes beautifully, arrestingly. And what I mean by that, is that the reader is along for the journey, and from time to time the author will make a comment which stops the reader in their tracks, and makes them think – often a statement which needs to be reflected on, and sometimes a passage of description of the landscape, the country, the people, which rather grabs the reader by the heart and takes them inside the experience she wishes to help us feel.

As I progressed deeper onwards through the book, I found myself, often, with tears pouring down my face, because something of the heart of the experience of ‘another’ – other lives, had struck me. And I did not always rationally know where those tears had come from. In the end, I discovered pages and pages of highlighted text, where Mouillot had made me pause, pause, pause again and understand something of experiences of another time and place, filtered down the generations.

This is a very tender book, soulful and authentic, and took me to many more reflective places than I initially expected. Recommended without reservations

This is released on the 28th January to download and in hardback in the UK, and in America on 20th Jan. I received it as an ARC, via NetGalley. With gratitude

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