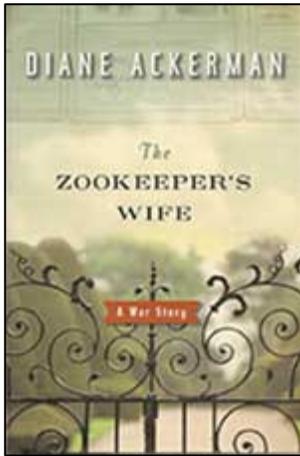


Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- July 2008



The Zoo Keeper's Wife, my book of choice for this month, has been on the bestseller lists for some time. I decided to read it mainly because I love the writings of Diane Ackerman, the author. I find that I often choose books because of the author. I'm sure many of you have your favorite authors also. Ackerman is a wonderful natural history writer; her books are often a compilation of her articles for *The New Yorker* and other major magazines.

The Zoo Keeper's Wife is different from her other books, in that while there are animals in it, people and an historical era are the main focus. The zoo is in Warsaw, the setting is the timeperiod when Germany is taking over Poland, and the characters are real people, with the dilemma of trying to save the zoo animals-- and beyond that, saving the Jews who were being exterminated. The stark reality of life in those times comes through loud and clear, heartbreaking in the inhumanity of man to man. I firmly believe it is necessary for us to read and understand what went on during the third Reich so it does not happen again.

This book is not of the easy-read kind, but of the-I'm-glad-I-read-it kind. Antonina Zabinski is an indomitable woman, a true hero in every sense of the word. Her husband Jan becomes active in the underground and moving their guests (artists, intelligentsia, political activists, Jews) on to the next station, hide out, safe place or wherever they could to keep people alive.

One of this book's reviewers, Jared Diamond, said this. "This powerful thriller could be a great novel---except that it is true." Therein lies the horror.

The greatest gift this book gave me is a deeper gratitude that I live in this country in today's time period.

My take home for writers this month is to suggest that you read this book, and focus on the amount of research the author had to accomplish in order to write the story; the trips, the books, the archives, interviews, everything it took to make this book the classic that I believe it will become. Thankfully, the real-life Antonina kept a diary; one of the most valuable resources a writer can have.

Anytime I can find journals, family histories or collections of family stories, I rejoice and snatch them up. While the turn-of-the-century period I write about is well-documented, the daily living kinds of things that make my characters come alive are not. And it was the daily living portrayed in *The Zoo Keeper's Wife* that made the story so compelling.

I sometimes think of future historians and the wealth of information they will have about this period we live in. I wonder if they will look on our times as the “good, old times” and “when life was simpler.” Hard to believe isn't it?

I hope you are finding time to read this summer, and that you put *The Zoo Keeper's Wife* on the top of your to-be-read pile. *What About Cimarron?*, a re-issue of my very first youth fiction book, will come out in September. My next adult historical novel, *Rebecca's Reward*, will be available in October, along with *One Perfect Day*, my next contemporary novel.

Blessings on your summer, and until next time,

Happy readin' and writin' from Lauraine.