

LISA GRUENBERG

PHYSICIAN, WRITER, MEDICAL EDUCATOR

www.lisagruenberg.com



EDUCATION AND AFFILIATIONS

- Williams College, Williamstown, MA, BA, 1976
- Albany Medical College, MD, 1982
- Obstetrics and Gynecology Residency, Beth Israel Hospital, Boston MA, 1986
- MFA creative writing, Lesley University, Cambridge MA, 2007
- Fulbright Senior Specialist Grant, University of Melbourne 2015
- Advanced Certificate Health Professions Education, MGH Institute of Health Professions, 2019
- Division of Global Health Equity Brigham and Women's Hospital and Assistant Professor Harvard Medical School

TALKS AND WORKSHOP OFFERINGS

I offer book talks, conversations with other authors and artists, as well as history of medicine and psychiatry talks focused on a case study from 1942 by Victor Frankl. I also use *My City of Dreams* to explore bioethics subjects and the transformation of genealogy research into personal narrative. Writing workshops incorporate prompts and free writing to generate new work in a judgement-free space. We can also explore the narratives of “difficult patients” as a way of developing empathy and resilience for medical practitioners and trainees. On the medical education front, I have developed a series of workshops on learning theory, to stimulate curated conversations that provide the basis for curriculum development tailored to different cultural settings.

MY STORY

Born in Canada and raised in Syracuse, NY, I am a volunteer physician, medical educator, and writer based in New England. I began writing in 2004, when my father, a Viennese Holocaust survivor, began having nightmares and flashbacks about his past. At the time I was suffering from depression and insomnia, and I was woken in the middle of the night by the voice of his sister, Mia, who disappeared into Germany in 1941 when she was just fifteen years old. I was compelled to write down her words.

After my father's death in 2005, I traveled to Vienna, Germany and back to my childhood to explore this lost landscape, and to trace the fates of Mia, their extended family, friends, and neighbors. I wove our stories together, linking them with photographs, archival documents, family letters, diaries, my father's writing, his genealogy research, and the joyful tales he told me long ago. *My City of Dreams*, published in 2019 by Cambridge-based TidePool Press, is a Holocaust tale, but it is also very much the modern-day story of the relationship between one daughter and her father, about how trauma travels down through the generations, and about how we find meaning in our lives. The book is available in hardcover, paperback, Kindle and Audible.

In addition to *My City*, my essays have been published in several literary magazines, including *Ploughshare*, *The Intima*, *a Journal of Narrative Medicine*, and the *Michigan Quarterly Review*. My short story set in South Africa, *Keiskamma*, won the 2012 Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Fellowship. I just completed my first novel, a fictionalized version of Mia and her brothers' stories. I am working on three linked novels, and essays on medicine, my mother, now 104, and our evolving relationship with our medically challenged grandson.

I have taught creative writing workshops at Harvard Medical School, Harvard College, the Asian University for Women, and the Karolinska Institute. I was a keynote speaker at the Medicine and the Holocaust Conference in Israel in 2017 and presented *My City* to the Jewish Book Council at their conferences in May 2019 and 2020. I have presented in many venues, including the Boston Public Library, Harvard Center for Bioethics, CU Anschutz Center for Bioethics and Humanities, Stanford University, the Examined Life Conference, and the Holocaust Museum of Los Angeles.

PUBLICATIONS

- ***My City of Dreams***, a memoir, TidePool Press, September 2019
- ***And the Lame Shall Walk***, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Summer 2019
- ***Eulogy***, *Hospital Drive*, 2018
- ***A Beautiful Day***, *Ploughshares*, 2014
- ***Memory Stones***, *Crossroads, The Intima, a Journal of Narrative Medicine*, 2014
- ***Yom Kippur***, *The Intima, a Journal of Narrative Medicine*, 2014
- ***Massachusetts Physicians Respond to Disaster in Haiti***, *Vital Signs*, March 2010, ***MMS Helps Cover Physician Volunteers amid Surge in Demand for Free Care***, *Vital Signs*, December 2009, ***Volunteer Physicians Rediscover the Essence of Medicine***, *Vital Signs*, October 2009

PAISE FOR MY CITY OF DREAMS

The past is a foreign country; sometimes best left unexplored. But Gruenberg takes the trip, figuratively and literally, in an attempt to recreate her father's Vienna and the events that exterminated his sister, his parents, and 65,000 other Austrian Jews. *My City of Dreams* is a moving chronicle of hard work: hard literary work, psychological challenges, and the journey through the endless lists of names, the soulless archives of the dead. Gruenberg wields all the tools in the writer's armamentarium - memoir, fiction, poetry, dream journals and reportage - to rebuild the lost city of her past. This is the city we all live in, but very few of us have the courage to explore the crooked streets, the blind alleys, and uncharted byways of how we came to be who we are. - **Alex Beam, author of *Gracefully Insane, Life and Death Inside America's Premier Mental Hospital***

In this carefully researched and hauntingly written memoir, Gruenberg not only records her own life, but also that of relatives long lost to darkness, terror, and murder. In dreamlike sequences she weaves known facts of the lives of those lost into tableaux of imagined family dinners, conversations and leisure activities set in the Vienna landscape. She embodies her aunt Mia as she walks in her shoes, sees with her eyes, and speaks with her voice. These flights into the past are presented within the framework of Gruenberg's own family, her husband and daughters, and her elderly father, who escaped from Vienna in 1939 and shared few of his more harrowing memories with her. Trauma and the feelings of guilt often described in Holocaust survivors is reflected in this memoir, also the burden shared by so many of their children and grandchildren. At the same time, this tale is one of lightness and finding balance in all of these difficulties and trials. At the center of this memoir stands the author's ability to look at the truth unflinchingly, including the truths apparent in herself. She shares her insights in all their nakedness, starkness and, yes, hilarity. This together with the author's luminous prose, make *My City of Dreams* an important landmark in 21st century testimony of the Holocaust. - **Dr Sabine Hildebrandt, author of *Anatomy of Murder, Ethical Transgressions and Anatomical Science during the Third Reich***

It seems far more pertinent to note the emotional heft *My City of Dreams* can evoke. Whatever it reveals of the lives of these characters, there is surely enough to touch at the history of any reader. – **The late Loring Mandel, Emmy award winning screenwriter of *Conspiracy*, from the *Michigan Quarterly Review***

Gruenberg's search for coherence becomes a journey of both discovery and imagination, and ultimately brings her to an understanding that proves also to be a form of healing. *My City of Dreams* is a gift—an honest and thoughtful book, beautifully written and full of compassion. – **Jane Brox, author of *Brilliant and Silence***