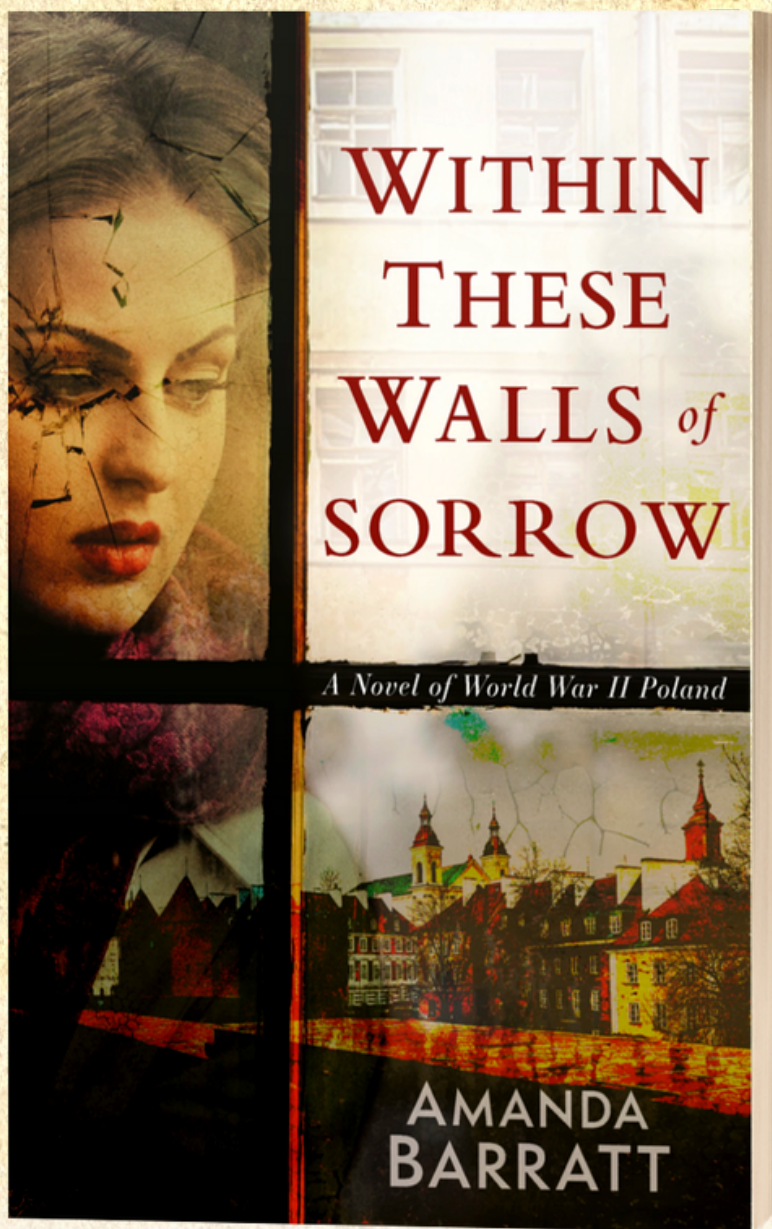


"Within These Walls of Sorrow is an emotional journey that acknowledges both the horror of war and the resilience of the human spirit."

—Stephanie Landsem

Bestselling author of *Code Name Edelweiss* and *In a Far-Off Land*



BOOK CLUB KIT

Praise

“An intimate look at the Holocaust, capturing how faith and selflessness can persist even in dire times. Moving and effective, this inspirational finds light in the darkest of places.”

– Publishers Weekly

“As superbly written as it is haunting in its truth, *Within These Walls of Sorrow* unveils the darkness of inhumanity and the soul-wrenching fate of thousands in Poland during Hitler’s reign of terror in WWII. Once again Amanda Barratt captures with riveting intensity the lives of her characters who fight to survive against insurmountable odds before the maw of the Nazi beast. Yet amid the despair and loss, she shines a fine, beautiful light on the hope, courage, and dignity of these people—enough to make one weep. *Within These Walls of Sorrow* should be required reading for this generation, and for any who continue to deny the Holocaust. Truly a *tour de force*.”

– Kate Breslin, bestselling author of *As Dawn Breaks*

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for a friend, and Amanda Barratt’s heartrending novel shows this truth in stark and powerful reality. Amid the Nazi terrors of war-torn Krakow, the love of family and the bonds of friendship withstand the ultimate test of faith and courage to emerge victorious. *Within These Walls of Sorrow* is an emotional journey that acknowledges both the horror of war and the resilience of the human spirit.”

– Stephanie Landsem, author of *Code Name Edelweiss* and *In a Far-Off Land*

Dear Readers,

What a privilege it is to share *Within These Walls of Sorrow* with you—a novel of a humble pharmacy that became a small light behind ghetto walls, a group of unsung heroes who fought for hope and humanity, and a friendship that defied the darkest of times. If you and your book group have chosen this novel to read together . . . thank you! Book groups are close to my heart, both as an author and an avid reader. What better way to spend an evening—or any time of day—than by gathering with friends, sharing coffee or tea, and exploring the power of story? When books bring us together, our lives are enriched twofold—by the stories themselves and by the community they forge.

Visiting book clubs is always a joy. If you would like to schedule a virtual visit, please reach out through the contact form on my website and I'll be in touch. Book clubs will also receive upon request a special package with signed bookplates, bookmarks, and other treats for your group to enjoy.

Thank you for journeying with this story!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A'.

Discussion Questions

1. Had you heard of the pharmacy in the Kraków ghetto before reading the novel? If so, did discovering this true story through the lens of historical fiction provide a different perspective? If you weren't familiar with the story of the pharmacy, what surprised you most?
2. Many are familiar with the Kraków ghetto and Płaszów camp because of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*. Have you seen the film, and if so, did any scenes come to mind as you read *Within These Walls of Sorrow*? Did you spot the mention of Schindler's factory?
3. When Hania's father reads aloud the decree about the establishment of the ghetto, she reflects upon the events that led up to this point. The Holocaust began as a gradual stripping away—first, deprivation of rights (the early decrees), then deprivation of liberty (the ghettos), culminating in deprivation of life (the death camps). What are the inherent dangers of this slow, but steady progression? What role did deception play in the Nazi genocide?
4. What do you think motivated Tadeusz Pankiewicz to remain at his pharmacy when the ghetto was established? How might his motivations have changed as time went on?
5. One of the themes in the novel is found in Ryszard's words, "There is evil and there is good and there is the space between. We are given free will to choose where we stand. Evil thrives when good men choose the space between." Do you agree? Which is easier—evil or indifference? Why do we choose the space between?
6. The durability of female friendship is at the heart of *Within These Walls of Sorrow*. How does the friendship between Zosia and Hania change each of them? Do you think Zosia would have taken the job at the pharmacy if she'd never had a relationship with Hania and her family? In what ways does personal connection instill empathy?

7. As a policeman, Janek is forced to serve as a guard at the ghetto gate. Because he isn't a point-of-view character, we're only shown glimpses of his experiences. If the story had been written in Janek's point-of-view, what events or scenes might have been included? Later we learn Janek has been sheltering Jews in his home. This was inspired by an account of a Jewish family who hid with a Polish policeman. Were you surprised to discover this about Janek?

8. The theme of choosing to do what you can, even when you know it will never be enough, echoes throughout the novel. Janek tells Zosia, "There are no miracles. But perhaps in doing what we can there is the hope of one. Even when there seems to be none." What do those words mean for you? What would you do if you had been one of the women at the pharmacy?

9. During the "liquidation" of the ghetto, Zosia realizes it's too late for Hania to escape and must watch as her friend leaves for Płaszów. Do you think Zosia had any other options? What would you have done?

10. In Płaszów, Hania thinks, "In the face of the brutality in which we exist, is it any wonder we're becoming people we hardly recognize? What's more remarkable is what we retain, our scraps of dignity a silent defiance of those who purpose to destroy our humanity." In what ways do Hania, her family, and those she encounters in the ghetto and the camps practice this "silent defiance"? Discuss the forms of resistance displayed throughout the novel.

11. In what ways were the experiences of women in the Holocaust unique? How did gender shape their choices, their suffering? Their vulnerabilities, their strengths?

12. When Hania receives the parcel from Zosia in Płaszów, she thinks, "Only the forgotten can truly understand what it is to be remembered." What does this statement mean?

13. Hania does what she can to take care of Romek's younger sister Adela. Women often forged such bonds in the camps, finding strength through the act of caring for another. How does the relationship between Hania and Adela impact both? What do you think these bonds provided for women in the camps? Discuss the impact of human connection on survival. In what ways might it strengthen? In what ways might it weaken?

14. Near the end of the novel, Zosia reflects, “There is so much I do not understand and will never understand, but perhaps understanding is not what is meant for us. In its absence, I turn to God for the strength to believe. That He who holds the heavens is present in the earth and has not forsaken us. That our tears are not forgotten in His sight. That our grief is joined with His, and His heart breaks at the suffering wrought by evil men. That no matter how our lives may shatter, in His hand, they remain.” How does Zosia’s faith grow throughout the novel? How do we seek God in the midst of the incomprehensible?

15. Were you surprised to learn the persecution of Polish Jews continued after the war? Had there not been antisemitism in Poland before the German occupation, how might circumstances have been different for the Jewish people both during and after the war?

16. Though more than seventy years have passed since the Holocaust, antisemitism remains prevalent to this day. Surveys such as the one conducted by the Claims Conference in 2020 reveal a lack of knowledge about the Holocaust among a significant percentage of adults, especially Millennials and Gen Z. The link between antisemitism and deficiency in awareness cannot be ignored and should inspire us all to action. In what ways might you seek to deepen your own understanding of the Holocaust and further the understanding of others?

17. In the historical note, the author writes, “I sought to handle the scenes depicting Płaszów with care and for the violence portrayed to not be gratuitous, but to show the reality faced by those who lived these experiences . . . Thus I made the decision to include scenes that may be difficult to read and were extremely challenging to write.” Do you agree with this decision? What are your thoughts on the balance between depicting reality and overwhelming the reader with heavy content? Which scenes did you find most difficult to read?

18. What were your thoughts on the way the characters’ journeys concluded? What might the future hold for Zosia and Janek, Hania and Romek, Rena and the Guterman children?

19. At the end of the novel, the author writes, “Every act affirming common humanity, every risk taken to preserve a life, every moment in which decency and compassion were extended to an individual mattered. Not on a vast scale, perhaps, but on a human scale. And as each person chooses to do what they can, the human scale becomes the vast scale.” In what ways did the characters live out these words? In what ways might we live them out today?

20. What will you remember most about *Within These Walls of Sorrow*?

A Conversation with Amanda

Many of your recent novels explore WWII. What draws you to that time period?

*Though the Second World War has been written about extensively, countless stories remain untold or little-known. As a novelist, I thrive on excavating forgotten fragments of history and crafting them into an accessible narrative. In times of some of the greatest evil and inhumanity our world has ever known, there emerged glimmers of courage, resilience, and hope. The juxtaposition of that darkness with those fragments of light is extraordinarily powerful and inspires me as I write. I also believe it has never been more imperative to keep this time in history from fading from memory. Though novels such as *Within These Walls of Sorrow* are historical fiction, they can provide a stepping stone to furthering awareness.*

What sort of research was required to write this novel?

*I relied upon more than fifty nonfiction titles to immerse myself in the history of Poland during the Second World War, the Kraków ghetto, and the story of the Under the Eagle pharmacy. Many of the events depicted in *Within These Walls of Sorrow* are drawn from these sources. I read—and re-read multiple times—the memoir written by Tadeusz Pankiewicz, as well as dozens of accounts by Holocaust survivors. Since I wrote the novel in the midst of the pandemic, I wasn't able to travel to Poland for research, but the staff at the museum commemorating the pharmacy offered invaluable assistance, answering my endless questions and providing me with period photos, floorplans, and recordings of interviews with the women who worked at the pharmacy. I continued to research throughout the writing process, seeking to authentically portray and honor the experiences of real individuals through my fictional characters.*

Introduce us to your main characters, Zosia Lewandowska and Hania Silberman, and tell us how their stories intersect.

Zosia is inspired by Tadeusz Pankiewicz's three colleagues, all women, all in their twenties when they began working at the pharmacy. As non-Jews, they received passes to enter the ghetto and returned to their homes outside the district at the end of the day, essentially living in two worlds. Little is known about these women and they rarely spoke about their wartime experiences. The character of Zosia is also informed by the story of a woman named Maria Nowak. Though not employed by Pankiewicz during the war, she later became a member of his staff. During the occupation, Maria risked her life to help her friend, Helena Goldstein, escape the Kraków ghetto after Helena's parents and brother were deported. Yad Vashem later recognized Maria Nowak as Righteous Among the Nations. Through Zosia, I sought to honor these courageous women, as well as the many ordinary Polish people who risked their lives to provide aid and shelter to Jews during the war. Many of the circumstances faced by Hania and the Silberman family reflect the real and heartbreaking experiences of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children during the Holocaust in Poland. In braiding Zosia and Hania's journeys together, I was able to explore these historical events from the perspectives of two women who find themselves thrust into very different circumstances as a result of the occupation of their homeland and the unfolding persecution and genocide of the Jewish people, weaving into their stories the resonant theme of the durability of female friendship.

How did writing *Within These Walls of Sorrow* impact your own heart and life?

As I researched and wrote the novel, I was left in awe by the accounts of ordinary people who defied evil by refusing to stand in the space of indifference, at the risk—and at times, even the sacrifice—of their lives. Exploring their stories inspires me to consider my own life and reminds us all that even the smallest acts can leave an indelible legacy.



Amanda Barratt is the bestselling author of numerous historical novels and novellas, including *The Warsaw Sisters*, *Within These Walls of Sorrow*, and *The White Rose Resists*. Her work has been the recipient of the Christy Award, the Carol Award, and an Honorable Mention in the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards. Amanda is passionate about illuminating oft-forgotten facets of history through a fictional narrative. She lives in Michigan. Learn more at www.amandabarratt.net.