

Rogue Librarians, Episode 5
Maus: Part 1 (Why It's Banned)

Welcome to the fifth episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians, and sometimes a guest, discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, Winthrop, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We would love for you to participate in our discussion. Please visit www.theroguelibrarians.com if you would like to leave a comment or question.

We always like to start with uh you know what have we been reading, and so um, Alanna, I'm gonna pass it to you and let you think about what it is. What would you like to share with us this week?

Sure. Well, one book I really enjoyed from the past month was *Husband Material*, which is the sequel to *Boyfriend Material*. I don't know if any of you have already read this book. It is great, but *Boyfriend Material* was much better. I still enjoyed the sequel, the characters are fabulous, the romance is great, I just love the two main characters. So it was really fun to get to spend more time with them. And how about you, Dorothy?

I listened to this book called *A Dream About Lightning Bugs*. It's a memoir by Ben Folds, who was Ben Folds Five was a band I enjoyed in the nineties, which not a lot of people are super familiar with Ben Folds. Well, the book is a lot, so here he reads it. So he was kind of a wild child, you know he got himself in all kinds of trouble. He almost really just lucked into his career. So it was great, I really enjoyed it, awesome. What about you?

And so I've been reading *In Transit* by Dianna E. Anderson. Um which for those of you who remember from the last episode I was on, it's a similar theme. Um talks about nonbinary issues. It talks about from a more academic standpoint this time, less of a novel format. Um but it basically talks about the history of queer theory. Um as well as sharing some of the author's personal narratives is kind of fit into to craft a history of queer theory. It's specifically relating to nonbinary culture.

Great. And and so for me, um I read another book that's on the banned books list. Um it turns out but the author is Sarah J. Maas, and Sarah has written um well many books. Um but the

particular book I read is called *A Court of Frost and Starlight*, which is kind of a connector novella instead of sort of sort of I guess it's sort of a stand alone, but it goes in with her. Um There's a series that Sarah does called *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and um it's just pure fantasy and um lots of non-human-type creatures and um love and the solstice and just a really wonderful fun read. So um I kind of um along with the book that we are currently talking about in our podcast today, um I just really needed something light. So that was what I found and I read it, listened to it. I have a long commute daily to my job. So it was a great book to listen to on a long journey. All right, well Alanna, let me pass it on to you now.

Sounds great. Today, we will be discussing *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman, which in 1992 was the first and only graphic novel or memoir to win the Pulitzer Prize. This book was not intended to be written for young adults, but it is taught in many schools, so many young people read it. According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, *Maus* was the most-read comic in classrooms in America, and Common Sense Media recommends it for people 13 and older.

Interesting that because when I read it I said to myself I cannot imagine a middle schooler voluntarily just picking up and reading this book. A completely graphic novel or no, I'm like an old guy talking to his even older dad about things that happened, you know, years and years ago. It just doesn't seem like the one that the kids are going to be pulling off the shelves.

Yeah, although interestingly um I can picture kids picking it up um I've taught in some schools where kids will pick up anything that's in graphic novel format um and just be drawn to whatever the pictures are and may not know what it's about prior to getting into it. Um But I don't see them continuing to reread it, I would see them, you know, getting bored.

Well just I don't think it would hold their interest. It would turn them off because they wouldn't be mature enough to understand the content. And I think that and that's one of the interesting things that I know about being a librarian. Um and and you um you all as well is that kids are really good at censoring themselves. They know when a book is not appropriate for them and they just wouldn't continue on reading it. But I also want to make the comment that um since it was Common Sense Media that said this book is recommended for people 13 years and older. Um The same is true if you've gone to Washington, D.C. to the United States Holocaust Museum. And the exhibit, the main exhibit there is for I believe 14 and older. If I'm

remembering that correctly, they do have a version for younger visitors to the museum that's called Daniel's Story, but it is a very much easier to um to take view of the Holocaust. And um and so I think that that's consistent.

I think Common Sense Media is accurate in that depiction and as you may have picked up on if you didn't already know this, we will be discussing some of the horrors of the Holocaust today. So please be aware of that and skip this episode if you do not want to listen to that. Should we get into our summary of the book?

It's in two parts and the first part is Art talking to his father about his experiences. And it covers before the war, well mostly before the war, and certainly before the concentration camps. It's yeah, I think the first four years of the war, because he was in Auschwitz for the last 10 months. So you really get this sense of all the little changes, you know, that happened and the hardships that they went through even before incarceration. And then the second half really picks up when his parents are in the concentration camps. Uh and in the meanwhile, it's covering his relationship to his parents, his own mental health, um you know, issues of depression, those are sort of all sprinkled throughout, right? And then and sort of um the impatience that he has with his father as well, um because they're obviously um certain traumas, obviously the obvious trauma that that his father has lived through and that have molded his, his views on, on how you save things and how you use things and you know, not wasting money and um just views of people in the world and how you do things that that were formed that I think are very eye opening for Art, the son, Artie as he's called in the book. And if you didn't already know this, the different groups of people are presented as different animals. So Jews are mice, Germans are cats, Poles are pigs, French people are frogs. Yes. And Americans are dogs.

That's mainly how we see represented for now, we were going to go on and talk about why it has been censored. So this book was originally serialized from 1980 to 1991, but it made the news a lot recently when a Tennessee school board voted to prevent it from being taught in the district's classrooms in January 2022. This is the McMinn County Board of Education, and it was part of the 8th grade curriculum. And even though the teachers and specialists in this area thought that it was appropriate for eighth graders, um, they, the school board, decided that it had unnecessary use of profanity and nudity and it depicted violence and suicide. So they removed it from the curriculum for all of the years at the in that school district. And in the *New York Times* afterwards, Representative Steve Cohen, who's a Democrat of Tennessee and the state's first

Jewish congressman, said that censoring books about the Holocaust was a way to purge one's understanding of the horrors of what humanity is capable of. And he said it's depressing to see this happen anywhere in this country. And when it comes to censoring an easy way to reach children and teach them about the Holocaust, it's particularly disturbing.

Yeah. Um, I just, you know, this, this takes me back a little bit if I can jump in on this for a second to um of course I'm dating myself with my age, but when Yugoslavia, the former country, Yugoslavia was having wars that were starting to to tear apart the country into the separate entities that currently exist. Um and um and there were ethnic um, was it the Bosnians? Yes, it was it was the ethnic Bosnians that were rounded up and put in camps, um you know, somewhat like um the death camps of the Holocaust. Um and and they were being recorded by the news. I mean, there were video cameras, you know, they're recording these people that were incarcerated and you know, and it was so reminiscent of of this time period and I remember people talking about, you know, we could never have another Holocaust, this could never happen again. Um and particularly saying now because we've we've got these visual images on international television screens that it could never happen again. Um and and I just I pause and I think I believe that it absolutely could happen again that um that these, that they're these atrocities that happen. I mean human beings are so capable of these kinds of atrocities. Um and and it it just continues to go on in the history of the world and in the history of humanity.

Um Hitler was impressed with how the Americans eradicated the and the Canadians eradicated the Native Americans. Correct. They had a blueprint already. Yeah. Yeah. And that that wonderful, wonderful, but very, very difficult to read book by Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste*, um really documents that very methodically with lots of references about Hitler and that.

Yeah. And it's also worth noting too, that It's it's not like in 1940s this that the footage was not also on newsreels, it wasn't on everyone's household the same way that you had later on with with successive genocides. But if you still went to the movies, for example, in the 1940s, this was on newsreels, this was in every newspaper in North America. Um there's an exact number that was counted and I don't have a number of top of my head, but it's in the several hundreds. In terms of the number of front page American newspaper stories about what was going on in Germany and German-occupied territory in Europe um as well. Um just to make sure that that there isn't any impression that people didn't know what was happening um because they absolutely did. And the other thing too about you know, can this happen again, it's it's it's a

common question that gets asked in Holocaust discourse and genocide studies it continues to happen. It happens repeatedly. I mean, Jewish people, myself included would be one of the first to say that there is an ongoing genocide of the Uyghur Chinese people going on right now. And does anyone care? No, it's not in the media. I mean there's a Rwandan genocide. I mean you can count off on your fingers the different genocides that have happened since the Holocaust and none of it had an effect on society. I feel we tend to pick and choose what we decide to care about.

Which is why it's even more important that books like this are available. Because I think when you read *Maus*, you understand at least a little bit of what it was like, and I think if you understand you would hopefully be more likely to stop it from happening in the future.

But I also think that when you read this this book, you really have to put yourself in the position of some of the people that we encounter in this story, this this true story, this memoir basically. Um and and think what would I do in that situation? I mean there were situations of kindness and then there were situations of betrayal that were caused by um tremendous fear of, you know, what's going to happen to me if I'm kind to this person or if this person is found on my property or you know. And I think we think about that all the time because we have a very strong self-preservation instinct as human beings, and we keep saying oh we need more compassion. We need more compassion. But in the end when it comes to being compassionate about someone else or being you know, self protective, I don't think any of us know what we would actually do in that situation. I think we know what we want to believe that we would do, but I don't think we know and I think that you know, to to um to pick you back on what you just said, Alana, I feel like that's again why reading widely and reading so many different perspectives and reading real painful things is so important because I think we need to we need to have that conversation in our own brains. What would we do? And what would we do? You know on either side of this, would we survive as a victim? Would we survive as as someone who has been put in this situation on, you know, no matter where you fall on that?

Yeah and piggybacking off of that to something I think it's really important to say to is for some people this is not a what if um of what would I do if I was in the situation. Growing up Jewish, this is not an abstract concept of oh my gosh, these poor people, what would I do if I were. This is something that every Jew who grows up, no matter where you are in the world, grows up knowing from basically the day you're old enough to to to understand the concept of what

genocide is. It is understood that, time and again, the Jews would attempt to be wiped out. And it's something I don't think that people who are not Jewish can understand. I mean, obviously, if you are, if you are Rwandan, for example, or if you are, you know, any other group of people that has been through a genocide, you understand to a degree, you know, through your own experiences. But this particularly because I feel like the unique horror of the Shoah [Holocaust], specifically the targeting of the Jews and the number and the way that it went down that, unless you grow up Jewish, like this has never been an abstract thought concept thought exercise of, oh my gosh, this is crazy. It's something that is passed down through intergenerational trauma, that is so real. Um and you mentioned earlier that you feel like it would be hard to picture a kid picking up this book because it's a dad and his father having, you know, a conversation, but for people of my generation, this is conversations we would have had with our grandparents. Exactly. I mean, this is, I had a step-grandfather who was a Holocaust survivor. Um growing up in synagogue, we had Holocaust survivors we talked to on a weekly basis. I mean, just so that I mean this is not as far away distance wise in history as I think people like to pretend it is sometimes this is something that is very real and has repercussions still to this day.

It certainly does and then you know to bring in, you know current day politics on top of this. I mean one of the things I started learning about um when I learned about Holocaust history, the history of the Holocaust, was um I learned that I believe it's the *New York Times* that every year there is a full page ad denying the Holocaust happened, and I believe that is still happening, that there are a group of people who deny that the Holocaust ever happened. Um and okay having been to Poland and um walked through um some of the some of the camps, Auschwitz being one of them, and Majdanek being another one of them. And and I mean you feel the ghosts in these places when you walk through and it's not a pleasant experience and it's not meant to be a pleasant experience. It's meant to be you know, it's hallowed ground in the sense that so many people died there. And but it's meant to be you know, cautionary, we need these places to stay there as museums so that people can see the evidence of of what did transpire there. But it kind of reminds me in a sense of how you know in politics, there are people who are discussing, you know what's fake news that was a big um Uh term that came up and has been you know tossed around quite a bit, we hear, we hear it a lot. Um and and more recently there are people who are saying out loud and believe that January sixth and the insurrection at the Capitol was fake and you know so we really need to think about what is the motivation of people who are trying to ban this book and lots of others that we have been discussing.

Yes. And on that note um It's worth noting that since uh up until about 2016 antisemitism in the country was getting less, and at 2016 or so um it was on the increase and it has been hugely increasing along with other kinds of racism as well. So it's no surprise then that they're now trying to pull books there if you look at the numbers, the books being banned are all LGBTQ+, people of color, characters with people of color, and you know Holocaust, Jewish, themes, and I forget what the rest of the list was. But that's a lot of them. I I can literally get it if we want to dig into it. I can look at the graphics and before we get into the historical context a little bit more.

I thought I'd mentioned two other reasons why it's been banned in other places. Um one is saying it's anti-ethnic or ethnic insensitivity. Um and the other is unsuitable for young readers, which we've touched on already. And, for example, in 2012, in the Pasadena Public Library, *Maus* was challenged over its portrayal of the Poles, and the Polish-American um who was proud of his heritage, said that it did not depict Poles well. So, um that's just one example. And um after the Tennessee School Board's ban in January 2022, Art Spiegelman was invited to speak as part of a webinar sponsored by faith-based organizations. This was back in February 2022, and during it, he said that he was initially suspicious of *Maus* being taught in school, but that he, quote, has come to understand that children are very open to being educated and learning the reality of these topics. He also shared that he thinks the decision comes from parents and adults wanting to control their kids under the guise of protecting them. "What needs to be exercised is empathy and intelligence. Books have to be contextualized. The teachers have to be trusted as much as the young people need to be trusted." And he said a little bit later, "I wasn't really trying to do anything other than share. I thought (at the time), if I keep it honest and clear, it will do its job...I didn't want to dumb it down. It would have been impossible to do this only as a historical text extracting myself from it. The story is what makes it compelling to readers." And he said that it seems like some people want a "fuzzier, warmer, gentler Holocaust that shows how great the Americans were." So he said that um, he believes that should still be allowed in schools because it can be very helpful for students.

Yeah. Much like we want a fuzzier warmer or people not we uh fuzzier former version of slavery and it wasn't really that awful, right? You want to put yourselves in a better life. Yeah, exactly.

And I think that that is a big part of it. Like people don't want to feel any responsibility. They don't want to feel any guilt, even though America could have taken many more refugees and chose

not to. So I mean, America should, I think Americans should feel guilty for not taking, not helping rescue, more people when they had the chance.

Yeah, we like to paint, you know, I grew up really thinking of us as the great liberators, you know, defeating fascism. But you know, we just kinda poked our heads and at the very end we did not want to get involved. We could have done more.

You're kind of building off...there's a very famous quote and it's escaping me who said it. But the quote is something the effect of the Holocaust was a crime against humanity by humanity, that this was done by people and not just Germans it was done. I mean, it's the collective blame of everybody when there's a crime against humanity.

Yeah. And then the other quote that has come to mind in our discussion is a very frequently quoted quote that those who fail to learn history are doomed to repeat it. And you know what that means is, well to me, it means that we need to learn real history, not just his story, the story version but from the perspective of the victors, but all the different angles and all the different perspectives of it. Um and I mean again, I just can't say that enough how important it is to read widely differing perspectives in order to come to our own conclusions and not to buy a party line. Party lines are dangerous, and that's what contributed to the Holocaust happening in Germany and throughout Europe.

Right. Dorothy, did you want to fill us in a little bit more on what you found about banning books in general before we get into historical context a little more?

So I'm looking at a website. The group is called Pen America and they're, you know, an advocacy group for, you know, writing and freedom of information. And they've kind of looked at some of these titles that have been banned between July 1st, 2021 and June 30th, 2022. So recently banned books. And so there's a couple of points I wanted to make. I'll try to keep it snappy. But LGBTQ+ themes, 41% of the books; protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color, 40%; of the book's sexual content, 22%; titles with issues of race and racism, 21%; 10% titles with themes of rights and activism, 9% biography, autobiography or memoir; and 4% stories with religious minorities. So if you know, if you look at a lot of what is happening in political discourse, these things are all what we're talking about on various in various ways in terms of rights in terms of freedoms and uh many times when people hear

about banned books, they say, oh these are, you know, the parents are concerned, they picked up the book and they looked at it and they are concerned. But what this group points out is that there are at least 50 groups at the national level involved in pushing for book bans across the country, that lawmakers are involved in a lot of these. Uh they are providing they're getting local groups of parents together. So you might hear from a local group but they have been given talking points from these larger groups. So it is very much organized. Uh and it is my personal belief, I mean, we all, I think we've talked about this before, but we know that kids have access to all of this on the internet. Uh I talked to one librarian that said when the big news stories about *Maus* being banned, they specifically mentions uh you know like a bare butt, or something, the little mice in Auschwitz and that kids were running to check out the book and look at that picture.

Right. But we know that banning a book increases its readership and its sales and the sales went up a lot for this book. So I think it's naive to say they don't want anyone to know about this. I think what they want to do is frame a conversation where we are actively arguing because it keeps people hyped up, it keeps people divided and pushed to the extremes and that helps their political agenda, whatever that may be true. And if more people are going to look at the book and turning to those pages, then they're making it a self fulfilling prophecy in a sense.

Right. Right. Yeah. I just think though as many kids will get caught up in the anti-Semitic talking points uh as want to defend the books, you know, the the kids parrot back what they're hearing and they're going to parrot back all of these attitudes that, you know, half of this conversation are talking about for sure, nobody loves a conspiracy theory more than a middle schooler.

Well, and it's interesting because I used to work in a middle school as a school librarian, and I used to teach banned books week to the kids so that they would know what a banned book was. And of course, you know, we always I always started with having them guess what was on the banned books list and then I would show them the list that ALA published every year, the American Library Association, of what were the most frequently banned books every year. And they were shocked and you know I'd hear all these reactions the ooh's oh my gosh and then I would ask them well what are what are you shocked about? And you know and they would raise their hands. I've read those books or you know however many of them they'd read and I was like right and you know or they you know the obvious question why was that book banned, you know, whatever it was. And I would pull up some research and explain to them why it was

banned and you know they'd be horrified and you know and so then from that it would we would lead into the question of well who should ban, you know should books be banned or not, and, if so, who gets to make that decision? And you know and the kids were kind of looking at me like well you know whatever I mean. So but it all came down to I said you know you're minors and what your parents say for you is what is the most valid thing for you. But if I, as a parent, um banned all books for example, let's just be silly, that had trains on them and you happen to like trains, would that be fair to you that you could not read any books about trains and you know and they were like well no and and you know so that brought into a whole larger discussion of who has the right to say what should be in or not in a library, you know, let alone in a child's hands. So um I think that's something that just needs to be you know people just need to be aware of that. You know, I also used to say to the kids and I probably said this before in our podcast as a librarian and I'm sure that the two of you would agree as librarians that if I'm doing my job correctly in collection development, there should be something in my library that offends every single person who comes in because I'm supposed to have books that represent all of the patrons.

Yeah. So yeah, that's definitely true, Marian. Well, Winthrop, would you mind filling us in on a little bit of the historical context, especially for anti-Semitism?

Absolutely. So I'm going to try to make this semi-concise um because I could do an entire podcast series just on the history of anti-Semitism. Um I guess where I want to start with this is I feel like a good definition of antisemitism would probably be useful I think for listeners. Um so I'll use the most commonly accepted one. What's known as the IRA definition the IRHA [IHRA], the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Um and they're short version of the definition is antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and or their property, towards Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. And they have a much longer definition that is bullet point after bullet point which I would encourage listeners to go check out for themselves. Um but I think that gives at least a starting point.

Um and the other point I wanted to kind of start off with um there's there's a very famous and, listeners may be familiar, especially Jewish listeners, with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, who describes anti anti Semitism um in his paper "The Mutating Virus," which basically describes

anti-Semitism not only as one of the world's oldest hatreds but also in the ways that it has evolved over time that it is both a perception that Jews are less than dirt and they are also the supremely powerful beings that are pulling the strings behind the scenes. And that it's just whatever the problem of the world is at the time, people will find a way to blame it on the Jews, and it will always evolve. It has always had, it always will, continue to evolve into this new form of hatred that at its core is still hatred of Jewish people.

Um So there's a tradition, there's a running joke within Jewish culture as well that most if not all Jewish holidays revolve around the central theme of they tried to kill us, they failed, let's eat. Um which I mean you could pick off anything poor is an easy one on top of your head. You know the Persians and Haman, they tried to kill the Jews, let's kill all the Jews and throw them all out and let's kill them all and then oh they failed. So so now we get to eat and have this joyous celebration montage in which are these great cookies and it's this big, big party, it's it's basically Jewish Halloween where you dress up in costume and anytime Haman's name is said, you have a grogger beside the point, but a grogger being a noisemaker. Yes, ok. Yeah. What about and um Hanukkah is the same way, I mean this is I think this is one of the things I want to get across is that anti-Semitism always has existed and it probably always will and it's important to look out for it.

Um and one of the most common misconceptions surrounding the Shoah, the Holocaust, is that anti-Semitism, you know it went away after the Holocaust, you know it kind of went underground, the Jews got the little piece of land in the Middle East and you know everything's fine now um and honest to God could not be further from the truth. I mean, anti-Semitism is at alarming rates to this day, that make me scared as a Jewish person living in America, as someone who has a Jewish sibling living in Europe. Um it is terrifying. Um there are not a day that goes by that, you know, there's not something in the news surrounding anti-Semitism and there are so many more things that happen that just don't make the news, people aren't even aware of. If you asked, you know what happened in Colleyville, Texas, to an average American, they wouldn't have a clue, you know, and there was a hostage situation there a couple months ago with a rabbi and four other Jews that were held at gunpoint and you know, the ones that with the synagogue that burned down, No, that was somewhere else, this one didn't burn down. Um, but I forget the FBI the CIA, there was a SWAT team that was sent by the federal government that the initial news reporting was that they had done and and save the day, what in reality happened is they showed up and were kind of hanging around and the rabbi had thrown

a chair at the gunman and they all ran out. Um and that part didn't really make it into the news that it was the Jews who had to save themselves, ultimately. Um, and I mean the Pittsburgh shooting comes to mind.

Um there's just so many things that repeatedly will continue to happen um that and I just encourage listeners to be wary of anti-Semitism and to call it out when you see it, because for every time it happens on the right wing, it also happens on the left as well, and it's something I wish people would be more aware of. Um and before I go further I will leave it there. Um, but I hope that gives listeners at least a building block to start with.

Well, and I just wanna read a quotation, this is um, the Anti-Defamation League, um, which tracks anti-Semitic behavior nationwide. So in the United States found 2,717 incidents of anti-Semitic behavior in 2021; that's a 34% rise from just the year before and averages out to more than seven anti-Semitic incidents per day.

Oh yeah, anti-Semitic hate crime is the highest per capita level of hate crime in United States of any of any kind of racism. It is the highest amongst anti-Semitic incidents.

And why do you think we don't hear about it in the news? Because I think people have become more aware of, for example, anti-Asian rhetoric in the past year, but and I was certainly aware that there had been more anti-Semitic incidents recently, but I had no idea that it had jumped 34%. Why do you think that it's just not talked about more?

Well, can I jump in here for a second? Because Winthrop and I have discussed this a little bit. And one of the things we've looked at cases, for example, on college campuses and they're severely under-reported. So the actual number of cases, as opposed to the reported numbers of cases of anti-Semitic incidents is in reality much, much higher than that.

Yeah, absolutely. And the other, I think people don't, it's not a sexy thing to talk about. Society likes to go through. And we've got to mention this to like what you mentioned earlier about always wanting to have something that we're at each other's throats about because anti-Semitism has been around for so long, it's not new. It's not exciting. It's not like let's get all geared up about this. And the other thing I think that people don't like to use it for is because people on both sides of the political aisle in this country are anti-Semitic, and it comes, honest to

God, just physically from the left as it does the right and people do not understand this. And I think because you can't turn it into this politically divisive, oh, it's them over there doing it. It just doesn't get the same level of coverage, I think because we can't use it to be divisive. Um, I think just like in general, people aren't aware Holocaust education and we can talk about this later too. In this country, it sucks like 40 statistic from ABC News. 45% of Americans don't know how many Jews died in the Holocaust, couldn't give you a number. You walk into if you walk into an average college campus today and said how many people would give you something in the thousands, tens of thousands. Six million is not a number that they even could fathom. And I think that's telling too.

Yeah, I think that is telling too. I think it's also very disturbing to think about, um, going back to the quote about the Anti-Defamation League. Um, that, that, that total 2717 cases reported um, in 2021 that's the highest total tracked in more than 40 years of the Anti-Defamation League tracking these things. And we should keep in mind that the anti-Semitic acts were actually starting to go down in the United States for almost 15 years, and it was in 2016 that they started to move up again. Um, and now we're at a point where we have nearly tripled the number of incidents today that we did in 2015, Um, in the past year alone, assaults have increased 167%. And um, we've seen incidents of vandalism on the rise, definitely more harassment on the rise. And, Winthrop, you've shared personally with me that you've been a victim of harassment...

More times than I can count. I mean my first concussion in middle school was as a result of an anti-Semitic attack. I mean, this is something, if you grow up in this country as a Jewish person, you're just, it's a given you're gonna experience. I mean Jews in New York are beaten on the streets of New York every day. And does it ever make the news? Of course not, no one cares. This happens every single day.

Yeah. In 1992, I um, traveled in Poland and you know, it was the same trip where I saw Majdanek and Auschwitz. Um, and I remember being in Warsaw and making a point of seeking out about the Jewish areas, um, which largely in, in most of the cities of Poland still look like ghost towns. They're just shells of what they used to be. That was 1992. I don't know what's happened since then. Um, but but we also, my traveling companion and I decided that we were going to try to find a Jewish restaurant to go and eat dinner and um, it was very, very hush hush, you know how to, how to get to the Jewish restaurant and we did, we made our way there and um, as we were Americans visiting there, they were thrilled to come and meet us and talk to us

and the owner of the establishment came over to talk to us and was telling us that in 1992 so many years after, you know 50 years essentially after World War Two, he would um he was regularly being harassed attacked, beaten up. He said it happens about once a week and and just just to keep his restaurant open um and lots of graffiti on you know the synagogues that we saw and his restaurant and you know various other areas and I mean and you think about that because there are hardly any Jews living in Poland to this day, and it used to be the most vibrant Jewish community outside of outside of Israel.

I'm half-jewish and um my mother's family escaped um what was then part of Russia, now Belarus, um during the pogroms, and so they came over in the nineteen teens and twenties, but all of the relatives who stayed behind as far as we know were killed and so just trying to trace that side of my family's history, I was doing some work in ancestry.com a couple years ago. I couldn't find really anything. I mean that there is a little information about the stetl where they lived online, but no Jews live there anymore, as far as I could tell. And so it's that that whole side of our history is currently lost, which is such a such a shame, but I don't have any Holocaust survivors in my immediate family. So I did not grow up hearing about it because they had come over earlier. So it's just a very different experience.

Have you read *Everything Is Illuminated*? Yes, that was such a great...you know that whole idea of going going to the place to see what you can find out. Yes. That was a great book. Should we go on to our discussion of the pros and cons of this book?

I do think we should move on to that. And I think, you know, as we highlighted here, one of the reasons to read the book is the education that we sorely need. And if it has clearly been, you know working to educate people, you know, which is why they're banning it right? Well which is why it has been challenged. I know I try not to use the vague they.

Well, for sure. And and you know when the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum was established and opened um the goal was education. And I remember at the beginning, when it was first opened, they were collecting stories from survivors or about survivors and artifacts and pictures of those lost. Um and that's been a very important mission. And you know, it's it's a place where people can go and learn facts. Just the facts, ma'am. This is what happened. This is what was this is these are real. You know, primary sources, as we librarians like to say. Um but not everybody has the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. and to experience that exhibit. Um

which is incredibly moving, which is why I think a book like this which is also an eyewitness account in a sense. Um it is Art Spiegelman writing his father's experiences down um that things that really happen to he and his mom. And um and I think that that's what makes it so powerful and so compelling that it needs to be shared and and read because this really is um as close to a primary source as as a book is going well not as any book but you know this this source this sources. I would almost call it a primary source, I guess.

Yeah. I mean you literally see the interview process happening right and right here the author on the page thinking about what to include. You know like it's very, it's very transparent.

And I think it'd be really important to read both parts of it because if you just read part one, you get a sense of the love story between Vladek and Anya, Art's parents. But and you get a sense of how terrible things were getting. But you don't understand the true horrors until you get to part two. And I think if you only read Vladek's experiences it would be a compelling story on its own, but like Art said a lot of it, and something you mentioned Dorothy, is a lot of it is about his relationship with his father and how that's been affected by the Holocaust and the trauma and the guilt and I think you really need to see all of those pieces to have a better understanding of not only Vladek's generation, but also the children and the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren. Just how this continues to affect people.

I was going to put that under the reasons to read it is this idea of this generational memory and trauma has been, you know, in many discussions that I've heard in the recent past and uh I first became familiar with it through a folk singer by the Utah Phillips, who has a song called "The Past." It didn't go anywhere and he's talking about it in this uh he was an activist for like pro unions and that sort of thing and he's trying to explain it all of that work that was done, you know, is still with us and we're still living it. Um, but I've heard it mentioned many other places and I think it's a, it's an important conversation and this does a great job of doing it.

It's also worth noting to the intergenerational trauma isn't just some abstract thing, it is a diagnosable scientific condition, um, conditions the best because it sounds kind of tentative, but like I just want to reiterate that like this isn't just like some concept that has been made up like, oh these people are still struggling with stuff they need to get over it. It affects your genes, it affects your brain... Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's inescapable.

So should we discuss the cons a little bit now? Like what, what maybe could Art Spiegelman have done differently, or why may people be objecting to it in particular? And I did think apparently something that some people have objected to is the choice of pigs for the Poles. They object to how Polish people are presented in general, but specifically the choice of that animal. And so maybe if he had chosen a different animal, it wouldn't come under the anti-ethnic category as a reason to be banned. I'm just wondering if that would have made a difference.

You know, that's just speciesist, is it read to me like, you know, as someone who has no stake in the game here in any way as alliterative, you know, Poles pigs. I mean the Germans as cats made sense because their relationship to the mice. Americans as dogs I found amusing because it does kind of sum up something about America to me. But yeah, I suppose is there an animal that you know, if you are feeling persecuted, that you would not take offense? Has anyone taken offense to the cats and the Germans or the dogs? I've heard the pigs really singled out.

I mean, in a Jewish context, pork is obviously not kosher to eat or to handle. Um, so it is worth noting that there is a still to this day strained relationship between the Jewish community and the Polish people in general and a lot of it has to do with, there is still legislative processes happening in Poland that actively worked to deny Jewish survivors, descendants of survivors, from retaining back any like past valuables, anything that they would have owned during the 1930s and 40s that were stolen from them, you know, by German soldiers or whoever was around. Um, and there's actively things on the books that are being introduced now that try to prevent it. So like there is still this strain and I don't want to say like I don't want to pin it on like all Poles because that's absolutely not at all what I'm saying, but there is definitely still a strained relationship, and I know that Holocaust survivors in general have feelings about, you know, what they wish Poles would have done. And I think that goes more back to the discussion of, you know, what people could and should have done at the time. Um, because I mean it absolutely sure like Jews were marched through the streets of Poland past businesses and towns and I think that's why there's so much perception among survivors, but especially if like the damn Poles knew what was going on and it's like, you know, but if obviously if a Pole got out of line and said, hey, this is wrong, they have been shot on the spot. So it's kind of that give and take relationship too.

Pigs, it's how you interpret what a pig means to because I don't disagree Winthrop that that might have been Art Spiegelman's goal, but I also feel like, okay, you know, those of us who've read *Charlotte's Web*, the pig is the star in *Charlotte's Web*. So you know, that doesn't mean that all connotations of pigs are negative. However, I will say this um if you think about the kind of animal these are, so the mouse is a prey, is a prey animal. Um the cat is the number one predator probably that we think of in terms of attacking the mouse. So it made sense for the predator to be the Nazis. Um and you know, dogs are like, you know, these, we love everybody type people, which is, you know, that's not type people type animals. So that's but that was probably a proposed to everyone's view of America. You know, we'll show up and be the heroes and then, you know, we'll wag our tails and tell everybody how great we are just had our backs and scratch our ears, and pigs are farm animals. They're farm animals.

And um I don't think of it as a negative a derogatory thing, I think of it personally more as they're just trying to survive and I think that's what the Poles were trying to do because the whole history of Poland is they were taken over by the Russians, then they were taken over by the Germans, and they were taken over by the Russians, and they were taken, and this is the whole history of Poland for generations. And also another, you know thing to think about is the pogroms. Um You know, Alanma, you talked about your family escaping the pogroms, but um my travel companion to to Poland in 1992, his grandmother is descended of Polish Jews and was horrified that we went to Poland because her family had escaped the pogroms and come to America. You know, obviously well before World War II and could not fathom why any Jewish person would ever set foot back in Poland. So there was a whole history of anti-Semitism way long before.

You know, obviously the Nazis were there and I when I think of a farm animal, I think of a farm animal again, you know, just to repeat their just trying to survive. They're taking whatever is thrown at them to, you know, for sustenance. And you know, they're hoping that they don't get sacrificed and that seems to be kind of the personality of what what polling the role Poland played in the war. I mean I don't think frogs for the French was all that appealing either. And I think that that just comes from the historical connotation because the English disparaging frogs. So you know, and the French were not, you know, a lot of people don't think the French were all that great to the Jews during the war either, but that's a whole other story, You don't see that in this book, that is not in this book. But anyway, it seems like, okay, I don't want to say that it is not offensive. You know, there's many different ways this could be interpreted and talked about. And

I think that part of the value of discussing these things is to say, hey, if you are, you know, offended, let's talk about that. And I think even Art Spiegelman could have, you know, a conversation, someone on that topic if we're really gonna dig into how they see the connotations and how he saw the connotations versus how someone entirely outside sees the connotations.

And these conversations are also difficult to because, whatever the experience of the Poles had in occupied when they were occupied in the 30s and 40s was undeniably a horrible experience for them, especially those who were not collaborators and those who were just trying to live an honest life day-to-day with their family and their kids and what have you. But I also, as you do understand the perspective of look, I'm sorry, it sucks for you, but we were there were six million of us that were murdered. They tried to get us all, they would have gotten us all had the war lasted six months longer and that perspective of look, I'm sorry, that sucks for you, but like we are not having the same, we're comparing you know, and obviously any human life taken is a tragedy. Um there's a Jewish teaching something to this and I don't have the exact words, but to kill one life is to kill the entire universe, something to the effect of that. And any death is a tragedy. But when you're talking about survival and scale, it can come across depending on the intent of a conversation to be like, what it basically boils down to. What about ism. If you say, hey, what about this? It's like we'll know that we're taking away from what the main point of this should be. We're telling this story right now.

I think that's a great point. In the next episode, we will discuss the book in more detail. It will include some spoilers. So, um so be aware of that and please join us next time for a close reading of *Maus's* characters, themes, and significance. If, as always, you would like to leave a question or comment, please visit www.theroguelibrarians.com. If you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you find your podcasts, and thank you for reading with us. Books are meant to be read. Bye!