

Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode

Author Elana K. Arnold

Hello, Dorothy here with a cold open. I just had a few announcements before we get started on this bonus episode. First, you may have noticed an interruption to our usual schedule. We here at Rogue Librarians are a very small enterprise, and a few of us rogues while we've just been waylaid by life. But we're still here holding down the fort and working hard to make new content. Please bear with us. Second, a note that we recorded this interview with Elana K. Arnold before her book *The Blood Years* was released. It came out in October and is now available wherever books are sold. And finally, a trigger warning for anyone who needs it. We will be discussing the Holocaust, as the book is set in World War II. Also, we discuss being Jewish in a world that wants to "other" the Jewish people; there are quotes around "other." This whole thing was recorded before the recent Hamas-Israeli conflict and is in no way commenting on that situation. That about covers it. Now back to our regular programming.

Welcome to a very special episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marion, Dorothy, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We would love for you to participate in our discussion. Please visit TheRogueLibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @RogueLibrariansPod or on Twitter @RLibrarians. Additionally, if you join our Patreon at [Patreon.com /RogueLibrarians](https://www.patreon.com/RogueLibrarians), you can hear us discuss some other books that we love.

And today we have a special episode where we are interviewing Elana K. Arnold. Elana is the award-winning author of many books for children and teens, including *The House That Wasn't There*, *The Prince Honor*, *Winner*, *Damsel*, the National Book Award finalist, *What Girls Are Made Of*, and the global read-aloud selection of *A Boy Called Bat*. Such good books.

She is a member of the faculty at Hamline University's MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults program and lives in Long Beach, California with her husband, two children, and a menagerie of animals. Elana's new book, *The Blood Years*, comes out on October 10th. And while this book, obviously not out yet, not on our banned book list, this is not an official two-part episode, but she comes by our podcast honestly, with a total of 16 books that she has written that have been challenged or banned. So without further ado, here is our interview with Elana K. Arnold.

I am so excited to be talking with you today, Elana, and to have the privilege of previewing your stunning novel, *The Blood Years*. We like to start our interviews by asking what was one of the most influential books that you read when you were growing up, and then why was it so influential for you?

Thank you so much for having me here. I'm so excited to have the chance to begin a conversation about *The Blood Years*, which was such an important and difficult book for

me to write. But thinking about a book that was important and influential for me when I was growing up, it was a book that was not difficult. It was just a pure joy. It was *Anna of Green Gables*, which I'm sure you get more than ever now and then from writers, by L. M. Montgomery. It was the first book I read that I felt... Well, I fell in love with Anne, but I also fell in love with parts of myself that I had thought weren't very wonderful. But when I saw them in a character and I saw how wonderful they were in her, I sort of gave myself permission to become more fully the person I already was as far as... An imaginative person, someone who was passionate about life, someone who deeply wanted friendship, true friendship, and had just not a lot of luck finding it. So that was a... It's still a book that I think about very often.

I didn't discover that one until later in life, and I just adore it.

An English teacher introduced me to it. It was actually the year that the BBC miniseries came out, and she wanted us to watch it. And when I realized it was a book, I just lost my head. I realized it was a whole series. Yeah, it was pretty special. It was in the seventh grade, so it was perfect timing. Oh, yeah. Such a great adaptation. Anne, did you see Anne with an E?

I did. I actually love it. I resisted it, but I didn't love the way it ended, but I loved the first season especially. I particularly loved the actress. Yeah, she was great. She was very different than my Megan Follows, and I was, you know, resistant, but I do think she did a great job, too. That's wonderful.

I just wanted to say, I mean, just listening to you describe that and how you connected with it just reminds me of how much books are our mirrors oftentimes and why they are just so, so important that they be available for readers. So, thank you for that.

They're even their mirrors for things we don't know. I don't even know what the word is for that, because they're like a magic mirror and that they help us to see ourselves in ways we didn't know we were until we saw it on the page. I really believe until we have language to understand something, it doesn't fully exist. And that was a book that helped me have more language to understand myself.

All right, so your bio, as we mentioned in the intro, indicates that you have a menagerie of pets. Can you tell us about them and do they find their way into your stories?

Yeah, I do have a number of animals. I just figured out the new number yesterday. I have seven animals currently living with me. There is my big dog, Phoebe, who's an old English sheepdog, and our little mutt, Poppy, who is a Yorkie Chihuahua mix. And we have Joachim, who we adopted when my grandmother, who the story, you know, *The Blood Years* is about, when she died, we adopted her cat, of course. And then we have our own hairless cat, a sphinx named Crumpet. And we have a gold-capped

conure named Bird. And then about a year ago, my son Max's girlfriend Fran moved in with us and brought with her her snake, Astrid, and her hairless cat, Maisie.

So wow, two hairless cats in one household.

Yeah, we usually have two. So having just one was actually, yeah, you know, felt like we had space for the second. And they do find their way into my stories, for sure. I forgot the second thing. Well, first of all, they are with me when I write. So I almost always have a dog at my feet or a cat near my lap, or a bird on my head or on the edge of my computer when I'm working. So they are everywhere. They bring a lot of lightness into my writing, especially when I get into the more difficult parts of writing. But I would say almost all of my books have strongly feature animals. My work for younger readers, like a boy called that in that series, and just Harriet and the house that wasn't there. My first novel, *The Question of Miracles*, my first novel for younger readers, they all have animals in them that are very important to the children in the books. And then my young adult novels, sometimes things that are less cozy take place with animals, which some people really get upset when they read things happening to animals. Unfortunately, bad things do happen to animals in real life as well as to people. So some of those things make their way to my work for young adults.

Yeah, we took note of some of the animals that appear in *The Blood Years*, but we don't wanna spoil, so we'll just let that be. So without further ado, would you mind just giving our listeners in your own words an introduction to your new book, *The Blood Years*?

I would be so proud too. So *The Blood Years* is a book I've been working on for many years. It is my first work of historical fiction. It's set in Chernowitz, Romania, a city that is now part of Ukraine, and it takes place before and during the Holocaust. And it is based on the teenage years and the childhood years of my grandmother, Frida. The character's name is Frederieke, known to most people as Rieke. And she has a family that is incredibly important to her. She has a missing father who's off philandering, a mother who's missing in many other ways, who disappears into her room with sick headaches because she is so devastated by the loss of her husband. Her magical, terrible, terrifying, brilliant sister, Ostra, her older sister, who is in many ways, I think, the love of her life. And her grandfather, Opa, a deeply religious, steady watch repairman and jeweler who takes them into his home after their father fails to return home. And it's a story about sisterhood and it's a story about war. It has ballet. It's a very hard book to sort of summarize because the plot of a real-life person's teenage years doesn't follow the traditional sort of arc of hook and call to you know call to adventure and rising action you know as the same way that sort of a more conventional novel does. But I would say ultimately this is a book about the great and terrible things people do in the name of love. It sure is. Nicely, nicely said. Thank you.

All right so you have had quite a prolific career as a writer and we were just wondering how did you know it was the right time to write *The Blood Years* because you mentioned you know in in your forward that it was something you had had in the back of your mind. So how did you know it was the right time to do that now and how difficult was it for you to write a story that's so personal?

It was the hardest thing I've ever done, including natural childbirth twice. Yeah, I would say that I didn't feel that I was a good enough writer to do justice to the story for the first five years that I was researching and trying. But after my grandmother died, I think in a way that, which was right you know about a year before the pandemic, I think it's very hard to write a book about someone who's alive. It's fiction, it's a novel, but it's based on the major some major events in her life. It's very hard to write a novel based on someone where terrible things happen to that person when you know the person might read it. So I think probably my grandmother's death, which was, you know, such an enormous loss, opened up a space for me and also I couldn't be with my real grandmother anymore. You know, when she was alive, I would visit her house and I would sit and we would eat cookies and drink tea and play cards and talk about either the novels and once she was gone this was what I had still of her and so it was a way to spend several years again with her for better or worse.

She completely feels like family to me now I just loved the whole family so much and knowing that it's based on your grandmother it's so great to hear and know like what her life became so that's kind of a fun little bonus.

Yeah, my grandmother was the most important steady stable force in my life my grandfather was also wonderful in his own way but my Nana was charming and a storyteller and delighted by being alive and delighted by people even though she didn't always trust them I remember once I said to her I was probably 14 or 15 I said you know Nana I know terrible things happen I know they do but I really do think that most people deep down are really good and she smiled the most delighted smile and she said I'm so glad you've lived a life it allows you to believe that yeah and this like chill went through me like she truly was genuinely glad for my what she saw is delightful ignorance and she was so pleased to have played a part in getting me to that age right with where I could still have that belief intact.

I've had it intact and lately it's being attacked more and more it's I I'm not sure if I still believe it anymore but yeah wow I'm still processing the chill that just went through my body so yeah it was chilling at 14 I mean I got then what she was saying and I was like whoa yeah I mean I guess that was would be my follow up question there is at what age did she start sharing some of these very painful stories with you?

So just like Opa in the book says everything is cyclical. My grandmother gave me her stories cyclically again and again and again, each time with another layer, each time with more truth. When I was very young, the stories were about when she went to the country with her sister and her grandfather and her mother and they were chased by geese and there was an outhouse and the geese bit her and they had to have a stick and how funny that was. And stories about how terrible her sister was to her and stories about you know, her grandfather's apartment and the girl who was you know, would prepare food for them. Those sorts of stories. And it wasn't until I mean, I knew that she was a war survivor. I knew that she had gone through the Holocaust sort of that word was a big one in our life. It was a Hades. So it wasn't actually that long after. And I spent a lot of time with them. She was more of a mother to me than a grandmother. And I remember asking her, I guess I was probably around the same age, probably right around 13, 14 asking her if she'd been in a concentration camp, transition camp. And she said not exactly. And she started to tell me more about what was happening in her city and you know, how everyone moved into a ghetto and how many people were taken away to an area called Transnistria, which she didn't go there. She said, she started telling me more about being hungry. She started telling me about being sick. My grandmother was sick with tuberculosis throughout the, you know, those years. And, you know, she told me stories about ballet and dance and this girl Ruth who used to dance with them and what happened to Ruth. And I mean, my Nana was never one who would believed in hiding the truth from children. So she would tell me a little something. And if I asked a question, she would answer it and give me as much more as I was willing to take. And then I would be done hearing about it for a while and and she would drop it and then it would come back again. Remember, Nana, when you told me about that man, you know, who was he again and what happened? And so, you know, that's what we did my whole life was we sat sat around a table with tea and cookies and cards and each other and we she told me stories made up stories about illa the gorilla that you know when she crashed her car it was illa the gorilla who did it you know or when she bumped your arm and had a big bruise it was because a snake bit her bedtime stories but also these real stories and they were all told in the exact same way with like honesty and love you know so my nana believed as I do that children are whole people already and they deserve the truth and access to the full spectrum of of human life.

Absolutely and that is definitely something that Frederica grapples with you know people not being willing to share things with her so you know Opa doesn't want to Aastra you know is willing to some other characters her mother doesn't tell her things that she needs to know it's it's definitely a theme running through.

Yeah and that was true for my nana like she was you know I remember how frustrated she was that her mother hadn't given her information that could have really helped her um in her life oh yeah and religion too you know she has she was very apathetic about religion um so yeah.

Wow yeah well thank you for that. Um yeah well obviously this story is about the Holocaust um specifically in Romania, which was a bit different than the Holocaust in other countries um and specifically the city of Chernowitz um in the intro to the book you actually share with readers a bit of history about the region which by the way I started with that. And then I went and did more research on my own, so you just sparked that whole need to know in me. But I appreciated that there is that bit in the book about the history. And one of the things that readers need to know is how often Chernowitz actually changed hands and names throughout history and what would happen when it changed hands. So it was Russian and it was part of, it was Romanian and it was just a whole series of historical fighting over that area, I guess. But I was wondering if you wanted to share a little bit more of that history now, sort of to entice our listeners.

So I actually wrote the brief history of Chernowitz that I share here in parts to keep it straight for myself because it was such a strange, confusing time and place and language change, street signs changed, everything changed. So I needed a sort of a crib note of what happens. And so, I mean, even before the brief history that I start, there was a long history of Jewish antisemitism, well, of antisemitism in Romania, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Relatively, Chernowitz was fairly safe, but that didn't mean it was fully safe. There were still like outbreaks of antisemitic hate and outbreaks of violence, but most of the times things were pretty okay comparatively. But I like to say comparatively 'cause they were never fully embraced as full equals with the full respect and rights of their non-Jewish neighbors. In fact, there were like these sort of cyclical outbreaks of violence, people would be killed in the country, Jews would be killed, their stuff would be taken and then things would simmer down for a while. So, but it was relatively safe until about 1918 when World War I ended. And then Chernowitz became, which had until then been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that empire was broken, and Czernowitz became part of Romania, and it was renamed Cernauti, I believe is how you pronounce it, though its Jewish residents still, you know, called it Czernowitz, because it was such an important place to them, it was a cultural center, it was a place where a lot of Jewish people were professionals and professors, scientists, doctors, they had a lot of education, and a lot of art too, a lot of dance and theater. In 1927, things got, you know, relatively worse when this sort of anti-Semitic group called the Iron Guard political party was formed, and it began to promote the idea that Jews and other, you know, non-undesirables like atheists, homosexuals, people like, you know, in those fringe groups, were undermining society, so it was really sort of, but it was again, it was a cycle, it was coming back again, this hate. Things escalated again about 10 years later, when another anti-Semitic cabinet was formed in Romania, and started to say, hey, we should, you know, we should be allies with the Third Reich. They think like we do about these issues, which about a year later, or actually not that much later than that, just a few months later, Jews lost their status as citizens, which is kind of the boiling point, I think, for the frog in the, you know, in the metaphorical vat of water. It's almost too late at that point. Then World War II begins, Romania declared that they were neutral, and that didn't last very long. They joined the Axis, which is,

you know, for those of you with not a lot of history knowledge yet, kind of the bad guys, from our perspective. And Soviets came into Chernowitz, and it became part of, you know, the Soviet Union, and Russia, and they, everyone had to speak Russian, and all the street signs were in Russian, and it was a communist country, all of a sudden, and the Jews were like, maybe it'll be better for us, because we know it's not great to be under Hitler's rule, so maybe, maybe it'll be okay. It wasn't okay, reader, I'm sorry to tell you and about a year later anyway the Germans came in and took over the area and things got much worse. Chernowitz was held by the Germans in conjunction with the Romanian soldiers who worked together to segregate, murder, and deport their remaining Jewish residents. Lots of things happened. Then, in the next three years, at the very end in '44, Romania decided hey, actually, we're gonna be allies now and they declared war on Germany. And more things happened. Soviets came and then ultimately there was this you know the truce and the war ended and they became part of Ukraine. So all of that is to say it was a complicated mess in that area This is the book does cover the broad strokes of what happened, but my characters are largely ignorant to a lot of the smaller changes because they were you know cut off from the radio because they were oftentimes not allowed to leave their homes and so that was a real challenge to help my reader understand what was happening while my characters maybe didn't have full access to the history. Right. So the the letter at the front the the timeline is one way that I tried to do that.

Yeah, it was really helpful for sure. Good. Definitely, I mean I I was able to follow, you know, I thought it was very interesting the way that Frederica would get her news you know in a various various ways that she would hear about what was happening. Yeah So I thought you did a good job with that.

You know for a young a young adult, you know a teen, you have even less access to all of the news sources. For a while they, you know, had a radio, but then the Russians confiscated all the radios. So that made it difficult for me to have my characters get news.

Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, all of that history you were giving us kind of really leads into the, the quote that I was going to ask you about, which was, I believe this is when the Russians are there and they're getting some sort of official papers to be able to stay. And I'm going to quote now the quote: across from my picture under the section marked nationality is the designation Jew. Not Romanian, not Russian. No matter what this place is called, still, it doesn't name me one of its own. It just hit me so hard and really spoke to me about that, you know, particular situation of Jewish people, not, not just there, but, you know, in a lot of places. And I was curious, was this something that your grandmother said to you or was it part of your research? Because it's just such a well crafted statement, you know, for her to notice.

Thank you. Yeah, it's interesting to love a place that doesn't love you back, you know. And I think there are in here in our country, there's very groups of people who have

very similar experiences of loving their country, but not necessarily feeling like their country loves them back. And I mean, sometimes Jewish people here are continuing to have that experience in various places and under, you know, in terrible events that have been happening over the last few years here. Yeah, I don't, I don't remember my grandmother when I would say where where are you from? And she was sort of go, eh, you know, she by that time was like, neutral. She didn't love her city as much anymore, either, as she had when she was young. And she didn't really know where she was from anymore. Like she said, you know, European, she's European was the best. She could really, you know, label it because after she after the war, she lived a number of places as well, you know, before she came here, which is not in this book. And so, but I think that that that truth was the most important word I think in that sentence is probably the word still. Because again, as I was saying, it was the cyclical expulsion in various ways of Jewish people from their home, either by taking away their rights or not allowing them to teach anymore, or making them no longer citizens or just a simple designation of them as Jew, as opposed to, you know, Romanian, Russian, etc. So, yeah, that's felt important to me to put that in there.

And I mean, just from as an American, it's literally impossible to imagine less impossible these days. But, you know, to imagine the government just suddenly saying, Oh, by the way, you're no longer a citizen. You know, I mean, it's just, it's so shocking.

Yeah, it is, but it isn't like, I mean, I think about Roe versus Wade being just overnight turn overturned, I think kind of what we are saying is to women is, you know, are those anybody who, you know, can get pregnant is that you don't have full autonomy over your body, which I think is one of the basic markers of full citizenship. Or, you know, as we've seen over the last several years of police brutality against black people, you don't get equal protection and, you know, benefits of innocence until proven guilty. So I think we we say it too, in various ways.

Yeah, yeah, it's a good I was just thinking that I was so so we want to move into talking about the title of the book, *The Blood Years*, which you you then go into explaining in the body of the work. Actually, Madame Lucia is who's the dance teacher explains that the blood years refers to I mean, it's a reference to being a woman. And, and, you know, it has to do with, obviously, the menstrual cycle. And she tells Frederieke, being a woman, this is a quote, and again, a beautiful quote, being a woman is bloody business. There's blood each month for many years. If you lie with a man, there will be blood. If you give birth to a child, blood. And that just, I mean, you just talked about Roe v. Wade, but I mean, that that was where my head went, but also just there was so much about the strength and power of women. And yet, at a time, and, and still in a time where women have so little power. And I just wondered if you wanted to talk a little bit about how you came upon the title of the book? Did you choose it? Did your editor choose it? Did the publishing company choose it? But I just I think it is such a powerful title.

Thank you. Yeah, I love this title, because of course, it is the years during which, you know, Frederieke will bleed. And it's also of course, the years of the war and the way those two things rose up in her life at the same time together is probably, you know, what the book is about in many ways. And first of all, I'd just like to take a moment to note that not all women, you know, bleed, not all women have their periods, not everyone who gets a period is a woman. I write about periods a lot. And I've even seen a couple people online wonder if I'm a TERF, because, you know, when I talk about about bleeding administration, I'm in general talking about cisgendered women. So, you know, no, I'm absolutely not a TERF, trans women are women. And I'm writing about the experiences that this this character as a cisgendered menstruating girl in Chernowitz had, along with the conversation that she has with her teacher. So I just want to say that because I hate to be maligned as something that I'm not, and no book can do all the things. And so this book deals with cisgendered womanhood in the middle of World War II. So that said, the title came to me from a book that I read many years ago. I don't remember what it was, but it was a book about fairytales in a woman's life. And I just read the phrase "the blood years," and I was like, "Oh, that's the title of something." I didn't know what. I knew it was the title of something, and I knew I would never tell anybody the title until I used it. Very early on that when I started writing this book, I knew it was the title of this book. My grandmother told me about how she hadn't been told that women, you know, that she was going to get a period. And so, you know, which happened a lot. You know, you hear a lot of women, grandmothers' ages, and even mothers, you know, or mothers' ages who didn't know the basic, you know, facts of their bodies and what was going to happen. They thought they were going to die. And what's interesting is that often they do die as a result of being in the bodies that they're in. They're sort of fragile, owned by the men in society bodies that they're in. So that's where the title came from. Yeah, it was my idea. The title never changed. Lots of things changed through the drafting of this book, but the title is never a question.

Well, that's good. It's interesting when you were just talking about people not knowing what's happening with their bodies, particularly women, you know, coming of age. I remember seeing the play *Spring Awakening*. And, you know, that was another one that just spoke to me. Like, you know, and I saw it with my two children who were, I guess, high school age at the time. But, you know, and I turned to both of them afterwards and I was like, this is why I talk to you about things because you need to know. Everyone is better off knowing and it just perplexes me that there are so many people who think if we don't talk about it, bad things will never happen. To me, it's quite the opposite. If we don't talk about it, bad things will surely happen. Bad things are going to happen either way, but you're better armed to protect yourself if you have been given knowledge. I really think that people conflate innocence. They think that innocence is this special, important time and we should do whatever we need to do to protect it, including withholding information and lying to children. There's a tipping point where it goes from childhood innocence to manufactured ignorance. I think we want to

keep people in that phase because it makes us feel good as adults, not because it serves them as humans.

You're absolutely true. On to the next question. In the beginning of the book, in the author's note, you mentioned that throughout all of your books, you tried to transform pain into art to embrace ambiguity and define beauty even in the ugliest of moments. We really noticed this ambiguity throughout the book, especially in the religious faith of Opa, of Heinrich, juxtaposed with the questioning of most of the other characters, you know, don't have the religious faith. I mean, he's just a pure, pure good Opa is. Any of those moments stand out for you in the book that you'd like to talk about?

I mean, there's a moment near the beginning of the book where she and her grandfather and her sister and her mother are off on a first trip to go to leave the city.

It's not really the only time the characters leave the city and throughout the entire book and they're going to the country and she's very excited because her grandfather has just given her a watch and it's a very special moment and she has a pretty dress and she notices the woman in front of her has a similarly colored sort of butter yellow dress and she looks at the woman and smiles and the woman looks down at her and then up at her grandfather and says a slur that in Romanian translates to kike, which is, you know, a terrible slur against Jewish people. And that moment of sort of the beauty of the day and the beauty of this woman who says this ugly word, I think probably stands out to me as a moment from early in the book. Also, I think one of my very favorite scenes is the very beginning when she and her sister are standing together on the roof of their apartment building eating the last of the bread and the last of the jam while their mother language is in bed and their father is missing.

And her sister gives her some rules about what life is, she tells her some truths. And it's a, you know, I think these are these abandoned dirty, hungry little girls who for a moment have this experience of feeling like kings, you know, which is an important choice of word for not queens, but they felt like kings, they felt like they had real power for a moment. And so again, that juxtaposition of powerlessness and a sense of power that she got from being with her sister and having her sister share a truth with her. I think those moments, I'm pretty proud of how they managed to sort of do both those things at the same time.

Yeah, it's really throughout the book, you see a lot of it. So it was nice to have it called out right there in the author's notes so we could notice it.

Absolutely. Well, and I want to throw in to the ballet. Is that your grandmother was really a ballet student?

Yes, she and her sister both were. They really did do ballet with a girl named Ruth and the things that happened to Ruth in the book and Ruth's mother really did happen to Ruth and Ruth's mother. Yeah, and again, yeah, ballet is a beautiful thing. You know, your feet are traumatized in ballet. Your body is beaten and you're making this beautiful

thing at the same time. I honestly, I just think that that's one of my, I think that the older I get, the better I am at embracing ambiguity and being okay with two completely separate things both being true at the same time. If I gained any wisdom as a human, I think that's one of the main things I've learned is that yes, this can be true and this opposite thing can be equally true at the same time. That's the same time. Yes, and that is being a person. And so I think that's why that sort of heartbeat drums through so much of my work is because it's a, it's a truth that, you know, I think writing is about wrestling with our questions about what it means to be human.

And for me, that is an answer I have come to that I think pervades in at least my older, my work for older people, my routines. There's more of a sweetness to my work for younger people, you know, for children, little children. And I think I think that stuff is true too. And I'm not thinking it. But even there, sad things happen. Because that's life. Life, life can be set very sad. And we're also writing for your writing for, you know, a lot of people who not everybody comes from an intact family, not everybody comes from a loving family.

And, you know, not everybody comes from a white, you know, family, or, I mean, someone who's in a power position in our society, and everyone's reality is so very different. So I think that is, it's just huge that you do that. Yeah.

Power. I was just saying, how power works in fiction is something that's very interesting to me, and I don't think people talk enough about power, and people talk a lot about plot and character and setting and theme to a certain degree, which I think people often speak about theme in a way that isn't helpful, but that's another conversation. But I think one of the core, like, businesses of writing is thinking about power, and who has power, you know, on a scene-by-scene level, and in a larger world level. And a lot of being a child is not having power and looking for small ways to grab it, and learning that you have power in ways you didn't know, too, and then learning to leverage that and then seeing the cost of leveraging that power.

Oh, very much so. Yeah, I work with middle schoolers. I'm well aware. Yeah. But even with your - The power grabs.

Yeah. But even with your own children, and, yeah, and I see it all day long in a public library, so it's amazing. And I can't help but think of, as we're going into this next question, well, I'm just going to go into the next question, because you just made such a beautiful segue. Because one of the other juxtapositions that we noticed very much is the contrast of how women are considered vital specifically in Judaism. For example, there's the scene where Opa has to call all the girls out. Mom doesn't want to get up out of bed, and I think the girls are in the bathroom at some point, and he has to tell them, you have to come light the candles to start Shabbat. And that in Judaism is a traditional rule that the women take on, or traditionally. You know, it's changing obviously, but that's been a traditional female role. So there's a certain power there. And yet, and also Judaism for people who aren't aware is a matriarchal descent, has a matriarchal

descent. So if your mother is Jewish, you're Jewish, no matter what religion your father is, but if your father is Jewish and your mother's not, you're not Jewish unless you're converted.

Well, that's actually a relatively recent thing. Like traditionally, you know, if you go farther back, it also was, it was more recently that Judaism and again, there's a shift there as well, as far as depending on if you're speaking with a Reform or an Orthodox or a conservative organization.

If nothing, you get a couple, you get two Jews together, for sure what you're gonna get is a conversation, a disagreement about something. Right, so what's the joke about if wherever you have two Jews, you'll have three opinions.

Yes, absolutely. Which is, it just always cracks me up. And it's true, it's absolutely true. But you contrast that power that the women have in Judaism versus how powerless they are in a larger society and well, particularly in the blood years, how the women of that generation really didn't have power. I mean, mom was in her bed with a headache, pining away for her philandering husband because that was what you aspire to. And when Madam Lucia says to Rieke, what is your goal? What are your goals in life? Are you gonna get married? And she's like, oh no, I don't wanna do that. But I mean, your options were rather limited because you had to be, I guess, kind of the property of a man, basically. So I just wondered what your thoughts are on this contrast.

I mean, I think probably my thoughts are that it's not really that much of a contrast because if you look at any religion, the stricter you get, the more the women don't have options and that's true of Judaism as much as it is of Christianity and of the Muslim religion and all of them I will be happy to go on book saying, you know, the more strict you get with the religion the more the women tend to be disenfranchised, and so I don't think that that Judaism is exceptional in in that way if you go, you know, if you look at an Orthodox I'm probably gonna make some enemies on that one, but I don't think in general that Religion necessarily at least the religions of the Western world. It's the ones that I'm more knowledgeable about do women any great favors, and, you know, I mean sometimes you get thrown a bone like yes, you you know Shabbat is welcomed by the woman like in the candles, but you still need, you know men right up a minyan and men make that, you know, are the rabbis. So and men make, you know, a lot of the rules about you know what gets done. So I guess I would push back and say that I don't think that there is a I guess what they're only what there's like all female spaces in this book does there seem like women have more power like within the dance studio Madam Lucia, she wields, you know that stick and she has power there because it is this woman's space. But when the soldiers come in with their desires to you know to select a dancer, we find that her power is an illusion. Ultimately, she doesn't she can't keep her dancers safe either. So I think I guess and at least in this time and in this place place, the idea of women having much power at all is, is an illusion. And I guess that's the true of Jews writ large and women even double as far as, you know, as power, very limited.

Yeah. Yeah. Which, again, is why I've, you know, reading, reading this book and then, you know, reading some of your other stories, it just, yeah, it there, there's somewhat shattering, but it's, it's because we recognize as women what this means for us.

And I, you know, yeah, I do think that I am, I'm an, I'm an agathist, which is a term I learned recently. Have you heard that term? I love it. So yeah, an agathist is someone who believes that they're not the same as an optimist and optimist thinks everything turns out the best, you know, and a fatalist sort of believes that everything turns out the way it should. But an agathist believes that individual events might turn out terrible and things might get worse, but there does seem to be a slant towards things improving over time. And so not that this, not that, you know, this car crash that I got in, things are going to turn out for the best necessarily. But if you can take a step back and another step back and then another step back and take the wide lens view of history, things are getting better for women, for minorities, for the LGBTQ community, for justice. And I think I'm an agathist. I think you step far enough back, things are better now, even if they're bad in some moments. And I just think we all need to keep pushing in that direction.

Yeah, I agree with that. Yeah, it's a, the thing that has happened to me over the past several years is, you know, I really grew up feeling that we were in this world that was so much better than it had been. And I feel like that rug has been pulled out, you know, like two steps forward, three steps back, or, you know, however many steps. So yeah, that's a good thing to remember that it's the long view that you need to look at.

Yeah, like even if we go back 30 years, I still think we're going forward. And I also think that things, maybe what we need to, things aren't as much better as we thought they were, you know, but that doesn't mean they're not better than a hundred years ago. They're just not as much, a lot of us, especially, especially, you know, cisgender straight white people have been forced to reckon with the facts that things weren't as much better as we thought they were, but that doesn't mean that they're not better. It just means they're not as much better and we have to work harder.

Right, absolutely. And also, I mean, just to go back to what you said before, Elana, it is the cyclical nature of things too.

Yeah. And that's going to continue, but each time that the cycle comes around, either we're going to get through it to better times quicker or we're not going to go as far back, you know, those kinds of things.

Yeah. That's what I believe. Mm-hmm. And I think that's what history bears out. Yeah, I think so. I agree. And, you know, our segues have been just magical throughout this whole interview. We could not have put these questions in a better order, because our last thoughts kind of takes a little run up to get to the question, but there were really

so many moments in the book that really reflected to me things that we're hearing people say today. And because we have brought up trans women and LGBTQ+ issues throughout this conversation, conversation, I can reveal that, and our listeners know this already, but both of my kids are, well, I have a trans daughter and a nonbinary child.

So one of the things that just sort of hit me with all of the news in the world, the scene where Frederieke goes to get the newspaper and there, the headline is "Death to the Jews." Yeah, that was a real headline. Yeah, yeah, I believe that. Well, it just made me think through Frederica's eyes, you know, some of the conversations that I've had with my children. And I remember my child saying, you know, I think I brought up something that had happened in the news vis-a-vis the right and all the terrible things that some lawmakers are doing and saying. And they just said, "Can we maybe not talk about that?" And they don't need to be reminded of that all of the time. So just like really reading the book helped me to see what's happening here, you know, through different eyes and through the eyes of my children. And the quote that I've pulled out as an example is when Frederieke thinks about, you know, how they always hated us this much, our Romanian neighbors, or as hatred is easy to catch as a cold, as quick to spread as my own illness has in my body. Body like that just that idea of the hatred spreading catching like that to have seen that happening here you know towards my own children you know in my own country. It just there's so many correlations that I can see and Marion and I think you had one.

Well I did I mean and I want to jump into what you just said too because you know full disclosure and I've talked about this too with readers but I also have a child who is nonbinary and Jewish, so you know strike two strikes, and and as as a mama bear you know I just get I take things so much more personally than I have before and you know I just I feel things so deeply and so yeah you know exactly what Dorothy just said this is it just makes me question it just makes me question and then I start to think about why why are we so hated you know why has this been this this thing that society has hated Jews for so many centuries and you know and been afraid of you know people who are different who are not you know who do not choose to remain their cisgender or whatever or or if their sexual attraction is different it's it's a threat to them anyway and we've already talked about religion and what that does but but also the question that the quote that really spoke to me a lot was the one where she says that the rules change so fast that we absolutely have no control over what those rules will be even though we are the chess pieces who are forced to move and step with them who will live or die because of them and immediately when I read that the first thing that popped into my head was Roe v. Wade and how how quickly you know we we thought as women in America we we had options with our bodies and all of a sudden in one fell swoop it ended and you know and there and there's you know that's that's just one thing but obviously you know the life-or-death things in the book are so palpable and I mean there's just so much in that quote.

And I know that you you make those connections in the postscript you know asking readers to notice what's happening around them so since we are a podcast about book

banning we have to fit something in there you had to know in the current political climate that your book is gonna raise some eyebrows and you know get some potential especially if it if it does well you know the more people that read it the more attention it's gonna get and that it may well end up being challenged or banned so we just were wondering if you've thought about that possibility do you think about it when you're writing does it impact your writing at all does it make you want to make sure to say all of those things I don't know in either way.

Most of my books yeah most of my books have been challenged or banned. I believe I have 16 books that are currently or have been challenged or banned in various states. Florida most of all in Texas is not far behind, I believe, so I mean I don't think about it at all when I'm writing it's not my job I always tell myself to send up my business who reads my book. My job is tell the best, truest story, the best I can. And that's my whole job. My job isn't to even to make sure to put in things that I want, you know, kids to know, because my job is not to teach a lesson. My job is not to have a moral, you know, to my story. My job is to tell the truth about the human experience as I have filtered it through my wonderful privilege of being alive. And that's what I do. I imagine this book will be challenged or banned because my others have been and because things aren't getting better yet in this [?], although I'm hopeful that they might when now that there's some some suing happening. But yeah, no, that doesn't affect my writing at all. Yeah, I just I just try to tell the best story I can.

Well, you've done just a marvelous job with this book. And I have no doubt that it will do do well. If I were on any of the voting committees, I would definitely be nominating it.

Thank you. I want this book to, I want this book to win everything. I want this book to be read by everyone. I want this book to take as much space as it can. It's it's very hard for me to promote my books, usually, because they're just me, you know, but this book isn't just me. This is a book that is my grandmother. This is a book that is deeply researched in the lived experiences of Jewish Chernowitzers. I worked with Jewish Chernowitzers, who, you know, acted as a reader for me. I read so many testimonials and memoirs and novels and poems. And so this book, I am morally compelled to tell everyone how proud I am of it and how much this book matters and how I hope everyone buys a copy for themselves and then another copy to donate to their loved ones.

Absolutely, I'll be putting it in my in my classroom for sure.

Well, I will be adding it to my personal collection. I will buy it for both my children. As soon as I finished reading the ARC, I immediately went to our collection development team and said, "Are you aware of this book? Is it even on your radar? Because if it isn't, it needs to be and we need to order this for our library." And I was very pleased to know that they already had, so that made me really, really happy. But yeah, I can't

stop talking about this book. I'll admit, I was the first of our Rogue Librarians team to read it. And I kept telling the other two, "Could y'all hurry up and read this book?" Could you read it? I need to talk to you. I need to talk. And so being able to have this conversation with you, Elana, is truly incredible. I wish that I could have talked to you as I was reading it because I just, and I know that wouldn't be fair to you, but you've got other things to do with your time. But it just, I felt like you were talking to me directly, so thank you for that. You have a gift, and I really appreciate the beauty of your writing and the stories that you tell and the impact that they have had on me personally, but that I hope that they have on all of your readers.

Thank you so much. I really appreciate all of that. That means a huge amount to me.

So, this has been an incredibly lovely conversation and we knew it would be.

Yes. We thought it would be so awesome to close with one of the quotes, or I think this is from towards the end of your book or your postscript, "Together, let's build the world with love." What a great thought. And that's what this podcast is all about.

Yeah, I said the end of the author's note at the end of the book,

Yeah. We're not trying to fight the big battle. We just want to read the books and find, you know, discuss the books and also just talk about why they're being banned and, you know, what, what's the implications there as well. Yeah. And for sure. And we want, we want the readers who have the bad fortune of living in places where the book banning is run amok. We want them to be able to have access to your books as well and, and to all the books that we've talked about and to be able to listen and learn and know that, that they're supported, that they're supported, you know, reading these books that are the mirrors that we were talking about just a few minutes ago. So yeah, so thank you. Thank you for what you do. And, and thank you for speaking with us. We really, really appreciate it.

Well, thank you for hosting the conversation and inviting me and, and thank you in, you know, in advance for continuing to, to help me spread the word about *The Blood Years*. I really appreciate the platform.

We'll do what we can. We definitely do.

And we're looking forward to whatever is coming next. Yeah, absolutely.

All right. Thank you both.

We had so much fun talking with Elana K. Arnold. It was such an honor to speak with her about this book, which we just can't recommend enough. She was so generous with her time and information. And you know, I just can't, can't wait for you all to get a

chance to read this book. You can find her online at www.elanakarnold.com. That's E -L -A -N -A -K -A -R -N -O -L -D. Elanakarnold.com.

Yeah, and you know, before we close up, I just want to reiterate what Elana said to us, which is about her writing and she's just trying to tell the story with as much truth as she possibly can and how important that is. And I think that is a beautiful kind of a parting thing to take away as we go back out into the world and think about this beautiful book and her other beautiful books and how many of her books have been challenged or banned, particularly in Florida and Texas. Just nobody's trying to write to convert anyone into anything. People are just trying to tell stories and be truthful and recognize that kids are complete people with the ability to have compassion and understanding of some tough things. So, I just loved the way that Elana said that and so I just wanted to plug that one more time.

Absolutely agreed. Yeah.

Well, we hope you were as touched by this interview and are eager to read *The Blood Years* as we were and certainly we would love for you to leave us a question or comment. You can do that by visiting us at therogelibrarians.com or you can follow us on Instagram or Facebook @rogelibrarianspod or on Twitter @Rlibrarians. We hope you're enjoying listening to our podcast as we are certainly enjoying putting it together for you. If you are enjoying our podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you find your podcasts. And most definitely please leave us a rating and review. We really care about your opinions and we also want to be searchable for other folks to find us. If you would like to support our podcast in a financial way, please join our Patreon at patreon.com/rogelibrarians. One of the perks is that you can listen to our discussions for other books that we love and another way you can support our podcast as well as indie bookstores across the country is by purchasing a book from our affiliate shop at [bookshop.org /shop/rogelibrarians](http://bookshop.org/shop/rogelibrarians). Finally, thank you so much to Chris for creating the music, for Heather for running our Twitter page, and for Lizzie, for doing all the audio editing. We most definitely could not have done this podcast without them and nor could we have done any of our other podcasts without our Alanna, who we miss and are looking forward to welcoming back soon. Finally, thank you readers for reading with us because books are meant to be read. Bye. Bye.