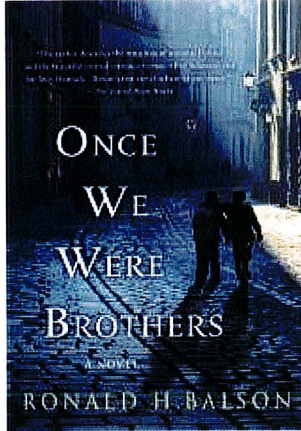


Once We Were Brothers

by Ronald H. Balson



About the Book

The gripping tale about two boys, once as close as brothers, who find themselves on opposite sides of the Holocaust.

Elliot Rosenzweig, a respected civic leader and wealthy philanthropist, is attending a fundraiser when he is suddenly accosted and accused of being a former Nazi SS officer named Otto Piatek, the Butcher of Zamosc. Although the charges are denounced as preposterous, his accuser is convinced he is right and engages attorney Catherine Lockhart to bring Rosenzweig to justice. Solomon persuades Lockhart to take his case, revealing that the true Piatek was abandoned as a child and raised by Solomon's own family only to betray them during the Nazi occupation. But has Solomon accused the right man?

ONCE WE WERE BROTHERS is Ronald H. Balson's compelling tale of two boys and a family who struggle to survive in war-torn Poland, and a young love that struggles to endure the unspeakable cruelty of the Holocaust. Two lives, two worlds, and 60 years converge in an explosive race to redemption that makes for a moving and powerful tale of love, survival, and ultimately the triumph of the human spirit.

Discussion Guide

Note: Some of these questions are different from Litlovers.

1. Does it trouble you to think that remnants of the Nazi era may remain? Of the six hundred thousand SS members remaining at the end of the war, only a few thousand were actually brought to justice. Most escaped. Some to America. Only one hundred or so have been found and deported. Was Ben's quest after all these years, in spite of Rosenzweig's civic contributions, justified?

2. Responding to someone who said, "I can't believe anybody cares about those events of so long ago," Eli Rosenbaum, former head of the U.S. Office of Special Investigations, stated, "I think there's particular value in showing would-be perpetrators that if one dares to perpetrate such crimes, there is a chance that he or she will be pursued for the rest of his or her life to locations thousands of miles from the locations of their crimes." Where do you stand? Do you think we should continue seek out and prosecute now-elderly Nazi war criminals?
3. It is said that "first impressions are lasting ones." What were your first impressions of the principal characters? At what point did your opinion change? Why?
4. Ben's family had the opportunity to leave Europe at certain times in the story. When cousin Ziggy told them of the persecution in Germany and when Uncle Joseph came from Vienna, they could have all escaped through the mountains into Slovakia. Why didn't they take advantage of each of those opportunities? Why did Jewish families remain?
5. From the diaries of survivors, there are many stories of extraordinary heroism, of ordinary people who, in the darkest moments, find unbelievable strength and courage. Have you known such people? Where do you think they find such courage?
6. If you had the opportunity to speak to any of the characters at any moment in the story, to whom would you choose to talk, what advice would you give, and what would you say?
7. Ben was a religious man, as was Catherine. If religious doctrine preaches that God is all-knowing and omnipotent, how does a religious person accept the existence of the Holocaust in God's world?
8. Ethnic slaughter, the oppression of minorities, did not cease with the end of World War II. Does the world community today do enough to respond to the oppressors? What should be done?
9. Why did Elisabeth decide to turn against her husband? Did it have anything to do with her fear of facing Ben?

Author Bio

Ronald H. Balson is a Chicago trial attorney, an educator and a writer. His practice has taken him to several international venues, including villages in Poland that inspired *ONCE WE WERE BROTHERS*, his first novel.

Critical Praise

"The phenomenal triumph of lawyer-author John Grisham's legal thrillers has spawned surprisingly few successful emulators; however, Chicago attorney Balson's first novel, while featuring a young lawyer heroine, Catherine Lockhart, who sees her bar admission as a license to further justice, is no simple imitation of Grisham's entertaining potboilers...., this novel is uplifting and moving, intelligently written and featuring historically accurate context and an unusual insight into human character and motivations. Highly recommended for all readers."

— Starred *Library Journal* Review

"Balson does a number of things superbly: he crafts a highly readable plotline and makes great use of the Chicago backdrop...many will enjoy this gripping novel for its narrative drive and its emotional storytelling."

— *Booklist* Review

"The author describes the atrocities of wartime Poland and the beautiful, eternal romance between Ben Solomong and his life, Hannah. Balson's first novel is hard to put down."

— *The Jewish Book World*

Once We Were Brothers

by Ronald H. Balson

Publication Date: October 8, 2013

Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: St. Martin's Griffin

ISBN-10: 1250048125

ISBN-13: 9781250048127

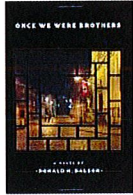


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Once We Were Brothers

Ronald H. Balson, 2009

Berwick Court Publishing

384 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780615351919

Summary

From Nazi-occupied Poland to a Chicago courtroom Elliot Rosenzweig, a respected civic leader and wealthy philanthropist, is attending a fundraiser when he is suddenly accosted and accused of being a former Nazi SS officer named Otto Piatek. Although the charges are denounced as preposterous, his accuser, Ben Solomon, is convinced he is right.

Solomon urges attorney Catherine Lockhart to take his case, revealing that Otto Piatek was abandoned as a child and raised by Solomon's family only to betray them during the Nazi occupation. But has he accused the right man?

Once We Were Brothers is the compelling tale of two boys and a family that struggles to survive in war-torn Poland. It is also the story of a young lawyer who must face not only a powerful adversary, but her own self-doubts.

Two lives, two worlds and sixty years all on course to collide in a fast-paced legal thriller.

The author, Ronald H. Balson, is a Chicago trial attorney and educator. His practice has taken him to international venues, including small villages in Poland, which have inspired this novel. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

Ronald H. Balson is an attorney practicing with the firm of Stone, Pogrund and Korey in Chicago. The demands of his trial practice have taken him into courts across the United States and into international venues.

An adjunct professor of business law at the University of Chicago for twenty-five

years, he now lectures on trial advocacy in federal trial bar courses.

Travels to Warsaw and southern Poland in connection with a complex telecommunications case inspired *Once We Were Brothers*, his first novel. (*From the publisher.*)

Book Reviews

Blending intrigue, court room drama, and facing the struggles of life that drive us for all those involved—the accused, the accuser, and the lawyers. *Once We Were Brothers* is riveting and unique reading, highly recommended.

Small Press Bookwatch - Midwest Book Review

[W]hen the oral retelling really starts it is a book I could not put down and the writing is superb. Balson has debuted with an outstanding historical piece of fiction and we hope to see more from him in the near future. Readers will not go wrong by picking up this book. Four stars.

Chicago Bar Association Record

Extraordinary story. I started on Saturday morning and finished Saturday night, ignoring all of my errands. I could not put it down. The legal scenes are authentic and compelling.

Richard Kling, Professor, Chicago-Kent College of Law

A terrific read and an important portrayal of actual legal work performed by real-life lawyers committed to pursuing those who assisted in Nazi atrocities and then lied to gain US citizenship

Steven Biskupic, former federal prosecutor

If you enjoy a good story, if you like novels, if accidentally learning something significant gives you a charge, buy this book and I PROMISE you that you will be glad you did.

David Templer, Attorney, Miami, FL

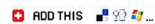
Discussion Questions

1. Does it trouble you to think that remnants of the Nazi era may remain? Of the 600,000 SS members, only a few thousand were actually brought to justice. Most escaped. Some to America. Was Ben's quest after all these years, in spite of Rosenzweig's civic contributions, justified? Is there a time to move on or forgive?
2. They say that "First impressions are lasting ones." What were your first impressions of the principal characters? At what point did your opinion change? Why?

Note: some of these questions are different from the one in the Reading Group Guide.

3. Was there a part of the story that was particularly moving to you, that stayed with you the longest?
4. Did *Once We Were Brothers* compliment your understanding of the period? Did the story give you a perspective you didn't have before?
5. Why did the Solomons remain in Zamosc?
6. If the story were to continue, what do think would happen next to each of the characters? How might their lives be affected?
7. From the diaries of survivors, there are many stories of extraordinary heroism, of ordinary people, who in the darkest moments find unbelievable strength and courage. Have you known such people? Where do you think they find such courage?
8. If you had the opportunity to speak to any of the characters at any moment of the story, who would you choose to talk to, what advice would you give and what would you say?
9. Ben was a religious man, as was Catherine. How does a religious person accept the existence of the Holocaust in God's world? Do you accept Ben's explanation?
(Questions from the *author's website* (<http://oncewewerebrothers.com>) .)

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Title: Once We Were Brothers
Author(s): [Joanne Wilkinson](#)
Source: [Booklist](#). 110.2 (Sept. 15, 2013): p40.
Document Type: Book review, Brief article
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http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/publishing/booklist_publications/booklist/booklist.cfm
Full Text:

Once We Were Brothers. By Ronald H. **Balson**. Oct. 2013.400p. St. Martin's/Griffin, paper, \$15.99 (9781466846708); e-book, \$9.99 (9781466846708).

This self-published debut novel, with more than 100,000 copies sold, has now been picked up by a major publisher, and it's not hard to see why. The story follows two boys, Jewish Ben Solomon and German Otto Piatek, who were raised together in the small Polish town of Zamosc during the 1930s. Once the Nazis invade, however, Otto takes a position in the German army, where, the Solomon family hopes, he will prove to be an asset to his Jewish friends and neighbors. But Piatek betrays them in the most heinous fashion. Some 60 years later, 83-year-old Ben Solomon attempts to kill a well-known Chicago philanthropist, claiming that he is, in fact, Otto. He pours his story out to lawyer Catherine Lockhart, convincing her to sue in civil court for reparations. **Balson** does a number of things superbly: he crafts a highly readable plotline and makes great use of the Chicago backdrop. But he also stumbles: Catherine seems overly naive about the Holocaust, and Ben's quest for revenge has fantastical overtones. Still, many will enjoy this gripping novel for its narrative drive and its emotional storytelling. --Joanne Wilkinson

Wilkinson, Joanne

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

Wilkinson, Joanne. "Once We Were Brothers." *Booklist* 15 Sept. 2013: 40. *General Reference Center GOLD*. Web. 7 May 2014.

Document URL

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**Title 8.
Holtzman Amendment**

*** CURRENT THROUGH PL 111-145, APPROVED 3/4/2010 ***

**TITLE 8. ALIENS AND NATIONALITY
CHAPTER 12. IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY
IMMIGRATION
INSPECTION, APPREHENSION, EXAMINATION, EXCLUSION, AND REMOVAL**

8 U.S.C. § 1227(a)(4)(D) [INA § 237(a)(4)(D)]

(D) Participated in Nazi persecution, genocide, or the commission of any act of torture or extrajudicial killing. Any alien described in clause (i), (ii), or (iii) or section 212 (a)(3)(E) [8 USCS § 1182(a)(3)(E)] is deportable.

**TITLE 8. ALIENS AND NATIONALITY
CHAPTER 12. IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY
IMMIGRATION
ADMISSION QUALIFICATIONS FOR ALIENS; TRAVEL CONTROL OF CITIZENS AND
ALIENS**

*** 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(E) [INA § 212(a)(3)(E)]**

(E) Participants in Nazi persecution, genocide, or the commission of any act of torture or extrajudicial killing.

(i) Participation in Nazi persecutions. Any alien who, during the period beginning on March 23, 1933, and ending on May 8, 1945, under the direction of, or in association with--

(I) the Nazi government of Germany,

(II) any government in any area occupied by the military forces of the Nazi government of Germany,

(III) any government established with the assistance or cooperation of the Nazi government of Germany, or

(IV) any government which was an ally of the Nazi government of Germany, ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person because of race, religion, national origin, or political opinion is inadmissible.

(ii) Participation in genocide. Any alien who ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in genocide, as defined in *section 1091(a) of title 18, United States Code*, is inadmissible.

(iii) Commission of acts of torture or extrajudicial killings. Any alien who, outside the United States, has committed, ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the commission of--

(I) any act of torture, as defined in *section 2340 of title 18, United States Code*; or

(II) under color of law of any foreign nation, any extrajudicial killing, as defined in section 3(a) of the Torture Victim Protection Act of 1991 (28 U.S.C. 1350 note), is inadmissible.

** Referenced on Pg. 382*