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Contact: Andrea Thatcher, Publicist
Andrea.thatcher@smithpublicity.com

Q&A with Robert Loewen Author of *The Lioness of Leiden*

Question: *The Lioness of Leiden* is inspired by the experiences of your mother-in-law, Hetty Kraus, in the Dutch resistance. Tell us about Hetty.

Robert Loewen: Hetty was a smart, thoughtful woman from the Dutch upper class—an early feminist. She was born in Indonesia—then called the Dutch East Indies—in 1920, but her family moved to Holland in 1923. Her family’s wealth came from her grandfather, Henry Mathis, whom she never met. Henry was governor of the large island now called Sulawesi, where he raised rubber trees.

Q: Hetty’s boyfriend, Karl, is an important character. Tell us about him.

RL: Karl is Hetty’s love interest in *Lioness*, but the real Hetty had more than one boyfriend during the war. Karl is a composite of those boyfriends. Before the German invasion of the Netherlands, Hetty was living an ordinary life as a university student. Another Leiden student, Karl was her first serious boyfriend. Hetty wrote a romantic memoir about the first time they were intimate, and that formed the basis for the character in the novel. Then, suddenly Hetty’s country was at war, and that changed everything. You’ll have to read the novel to see what happens.

Q: One of your endorsements notes that your novel is laced with “steamy romance”. Wasn’t it uncomfortable to write about your mother-in-law in those terms?

RL: You had to know Hetty, who was always blunt and uninhibited about topics that others might not mention in polite company. Her views on sex were shaped by the war; according to her, everyone in the resistance was sleeping around. So no, it wasn’t hard to write about Hetty in these terms.

Q: What’s it like to write a first novel?

RL: *Lioness* is the first fiction I’ve ever written. As an attorney, I had written thousands of pages of legal briefs, but I soon learned that skillset is far different than writing fiction. Mostly, I taught myself about fiction from sources on the internet and writer workshops. I don’t mind telling you that I left A LOT of material on the cutting room floor through trial and error. Then I found the most amazing developmental editor, Julie Gray, a Los Angeles ex pat in Tel Aviv, who published her own book about the holocaust. Julie taught me the basic rules of fiction. One was

“start late, leave early,” which means to begin each scene in the middle of the action and quit before resolving the conflicts—keeps readers turning the page.

Q: What are the main messages of *Lioness*?

RL: We have to make a choice when faced with aggression; we can give up our values, or we can fight for them. Hetty knew where she stood from the outset. Some things are worth dying for—like the invasion of your country. But death is not the biggest risk one takes by resisting. Hetty expected death, but she did not predict the devastation of losing people close to her. Hopefully, *Lioness* makes the reader turn the page to learn who will survive the war, but for me the most interesting question is how Hetty will react to every setback. It requires intelligence to recognize evil when it presents itself, and it requires enormous courage to do something about it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robert Loewen was born in Bakersfield, grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and raised his three children in Laguna Beach. A 1970 graduate of Pomona College, Robert served two years in the United States Army, including a tour in Vietnam. His 1972 marriage linked him to Hetty Kraus, his mother-in-law, who told fascinating stories about her experiences in the Dutch resistance during World War II. After a year serving as a law clerk to Justice Byron White at the United States Supreme Court, Robert returned to California in 1977, where he built a successful litigation practice at an international law firm. Known for his persuasive legal briefs, he has always been a natural storyteller who yearned to write fiction.

Now retired, Robert has published his debut novel, a fictional history of Hetty's life in the Dutch resistance

Connect with Robert at TheLionessofLeiden.com.

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