



Books & Writers



Ashes: debut from Hall County writer a compelling historical novel about Jewish workers in early 1900’s

A Hall County woman’s debut book is one you should read.

The author, Sharon Gloger Friedman, is a Boston transplant who moved here with her husband of 53 years to be closer to her children. Her historical novel is called *Ashes*, and it’s an extraordinary account of a Jewish family who flees persecution in Russia to come to the United States in the early 1900’s.

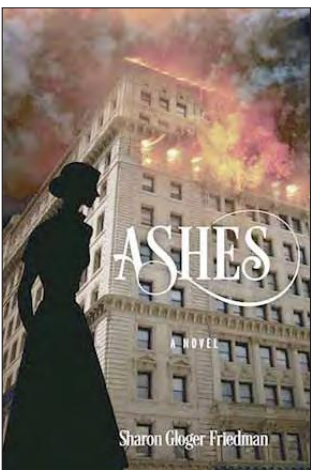
This is a story about love and survival, about overcoming loss and grief and about the indomitable spirit of the Jewish people.

The story begins with the Raisky family facing a brutal pogrom (a word meaning a violent riot aimed at the persecution of an ethnic or religious group) where Jews were tortured and terrorized by Russians in the small village of Kishinev. Friedman’s first fifteen chapters are intense and emotional, as the Raisky family suffers through both fear and tragedy - which ultimately results in their harrowing escape to America.

The story is closely based on an event that took place in Russia during the early 1900’s, and the repulsive surroundings that women had to endure working in the garment industry—conditions that the family also found after arriving in America.

“When my paternal grandparents and great aunts and uncles came to this country in 1912 they all found employment in the garment industry,” said Friedman. “I grew up listening to the horrible conditions they worked under for so little pay.”

Friedman grew up in south Florida and graduated with a BA in English from the University of Florida, where she met her husband George the first week in a



A new historical novel by Hall County resident Sheila Gloger Friedman about the horrible conditions suffered by Jewish garment workers in Russia and the United States in the early 1900s.

freshman writing lab.

“We moved [to north Georgia] from Boston to escape the cold and to spend more time with our daughter and her family,” said the author.

Friedman’s work shows an extraordinary amount of research—which is enriched by stories she remembers from her childhood told by her great aunts and uncles, who suffered under the deplorable conditions Jews found themselves forced into—first in Russia and then in early 20th century America.

The women found themselves working seven days a week for a salary of \$4 or about a nickel an hour (which in today’s dollars would be just \$1.60 an hour).

Worse than the pay were the conditions. There were constant instances of physical, emotional and even sexual abuse by factory managers, detailed in many passages of this book.

The former English teacher and seminar marketing director wrote *Ashes* to

“honor all of those” who worked in that dangerous and repulsive industry before unions and government regulations brought some mandatory relief to the men who ran the factories (at that time, they were always men).

Friedman notes in the book’s acknowledgments that, while the work is fiction, “...the Kishinev pogrom and the 1910 garment worker’s general strike of the Triangle Factory” are based on actual events that took place.

Friedman’s prose is remarkable for a debut author, and the conversational dialogue is both credible and easy to follow. Many of the exchanges between the father Meyer and his daughter Miriam will hold the reader and contribute to the complexity of the family relationships that serve as the core of this book.

The dinner-table conversations in this book are ones we have all had—with children, siblings, spouses, aunts and uncles. In *Ashes*, they also result in providing the foundation of both drama and humor in this book (although there is little humor given the struggles of the characters).

This is one of those stories that should be brought to the screen, either in a mini-series or perhaps even a PBS Masterpiece event. It’s that absorbing.

So far, that hasn’t happened. “As for movie rights, the only offers I have gotten were from two ‘scammers’ who would ‘develop’ a screenplay if I [paid] the upfront money,” laughed Friedman.

There are characters in this book that will leave you seething—and others who might remind you of people in your own family (those two things not being mutually exclusive).

The book’s fourth and final section begins with angry (and later regrettable) words spoken by Meyer to his daughter Miriam. The pace of book quickens as the plot moves toward its searing conclusion.

Friedman creates a feeling of such chaos that you will find yourself carried through the book’s final 68 pages, unable to stop reading, where tragedy follows tragedy and you are hoping for some brightness before the book’s riveting conclusion. Don’t give up on it.

Friedman told the *Progress* that response to her first book has been positive, and it is a novel already becoming popular among book clubs.

I believe this story would be a source of lively conversation at any book club.

The book is available at Barnes & Noble, Amazon.com and other places (while you’ll find, as I did, that while there are many books entitled *Ashes*, there is only one by Sharon Gloger Friedman).

While Friedman says she has considered a sequel, she is uncertain it will come. Instead, she is busy researching ante-bellum Charleston, which might be the subject of her next book.

[David R. Altman is a former Georgia Author of the Year nominee for his poetry chapbook, Death in the Foyer. His writing has appeared in many publications, including the American Journal of Poetry. He can be reached at altmandavidr@gmail.com or www.davidraltman.com.]

Youth theater workshop in June at Tater Patch Theater, sign up now

June 4, 5, 6, 7
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Cost will be \$30 for all 4 days
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contact us separately at taterpatchplayers@gmail.com and put “scholarship” in the subject line.

Any questions, please contact us by email.

Auditions for our summer Youth Theater play, The Seussification of *Romeo and Juliet*, will be June 7 and 8 from 3– 4:30.

See application for Tater Patch Players youth workshop on page 6B

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