

LISA GRUNBERGER

Writer, Poet, Playwright, Yoga Teacher, Public Speaker, and Funny

Education: BA in English and Religious Studies University of Rochester
Master of Divinity and Doctorate at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

B.A.in Life: Jimmy Hay's Steakhouse.
Doctorate: Marriage and Motherhood.

On my first trip to Israel in 1976, 30,000 feet above sea level, my mother gave me my first journal, complete with its own special gold key. "Write about what you see and hear and smell and taste and touch, Leeza" (she was Israeli and always pronounced my name like this, as did my Viennese Father). Many years later, I have over 200 journals in closets and in my basement filled with poems and stories. I have drawn from these journals over the years for material I have reimagined into the poems, plays, and stories you can find on this site, in theatres and in my books.

Writing, like yoga, is about practice, practice, practice. Each pose, each sentence, comes alive in the quality of our attention and concentration and in how we breathe. I consider both of my passions, yoga and writing, to be meditation disciplines, and they are always acts of love of and devotion to craft.

I grew up in a beach town on the southern tip of Long Island, the only daughter of immigrant parents, Rachel, born in 1925, in British Mandate Palestine, and Robert, who escaped Nazi Europe in 1939. My Omama, a Holocaust survivor, lived with us too and she, like my parents, is present throughout my work.

My illustrated humor book, *Yiddish Yoga: Ruthie's Adventures in Love, Loss and the Lotus Position* (Harper Collins) tells the story of Ruthie, a widowed Jewish grandmother, who kvetches and stretches her way through yoga classes. The Jewish Book Council sent me on a national tour two times with the book, which I am currently adapting as a play called *Yiddish Yoga: The Musical*. I was a recipient of the Dorbrecht Prize for Judaic Yoga Studies from the Society of Independent Scholars to work on *Yiddish Yoga: The Musical*.

My full-length play, *Almost Pregnant*, is currently under artistic development with The Squeaky Bicycle Theatre Company, Velodrome Artistic Lab in Manhattan. The Association for Jewish Theatre selected an excerpt from it as part of its 2019 showcase and it received excellent reviews when it premiered at the Philadelphia Fringe Festival in 2018, directed by Israeli director Hamutal Posklinsky. *Almost Pregnant* addresses Jewish identity, assisted reproductive technologies, adoption, IVF, with guest appearances by Gloria Steinem, puppets named Estrogen and Lucky (inspired by Samuel Beckett and Andy Warhol).

My short one act play, *Evidence, or Moon Immigrants*, addresses refugees, lesbian relationship, Jewish-American history, second generation trauma from Holocaust survivors, #metoo movement, contemporary U.S. border refugee crisis, Holocaust refugees to Israel, and family. It premiered at the Manhattan Theatre Company and was also directed by Hamutal Posklinsky.

My most recent poetry book, *I am dirty*, won first prize in the Moonstone Arts Center International Poetry Contest. My poem, "Genesis: Beginning the In," which appears in my first poetry collection, *Born Knowing* (Finishing Line Press), won the Brittany Stoakes Poetry Prize; a broadside of the poem was specially produced for it as well.

My monologue, *On Resemblance: No Bridge is an Island*, was selected as part of The National Association of American Jewish Theatre Conference as part of their showcase. I have performed my poems in funky spots all over Manhattan and in Philadelphia. I performed my monologue, *1966: Birth Tale*, (directed by Karen Ludwig) at the Westbeth Women's Theatre Collective in the West Village. I wrote and performed my one-woman show, *The Prayer Collector* at Makor/92nd St. YMCA. My art installation, *Series of Disruptions* was exhibited at The Producer's Club Theatre in NYC. I was a frequent performer and poet at the fabulous Cornelia Street Café Poet Series in New York until it closed its doors in 2018.

I have won numerous rewards for my writing. *I am dirty* was a semi-finalist in the prestigious Tomas Salamun Poetry Prize, and won the Moonstone Poetry Contest. I won the Sandy Crimmins Award for my poem "Secrets," which was published in Philadelphia Stories. I was a finalist for *Mercy Wombs*, my full-length collection of poems, in the Two Sylvias Press Wilder Series Poetry Book Prize as well as in Settlement House Press. *Jewish Currents* selected my poem "How To Tell A Story" for their Alexander and Dora Raynes Poetry Competition.

I have taught my yoga and writing workshop, **Facing the Blank Page, Facing the Yoga Mat** for many years at the Healing Arts Center in Philadelphia and elsewhere. I was the Resident Yoga Instructor at Triune Chiropractic Center in Philadelphia and for many years I designed yoga classes in Vinyasa Yoga at Equinox Sports and Fitness Clubs in New York. I am certified in teaching Yoga for Kids and Yoga for Pregnancy and have taught at pre-schools, YMCA's, and special education programs throughout the United States.

After earning my doctorate in Comparative Religion and Philosophy at the University of Chicago, I found that they weren't hiring many poets or philosophers out in the "real" world! So I turned lemons into lemonade and as an aspiring writer, I cobbled together an eclectic living through teaching yoga, bartending, waiting tables, and teaching college classes at Hofstra University. Waiting tables was my PhD in life and it has graced me with more stories than I have time to write. I have since taught Creative Writing, Critical Thinking, Literature, Women's Studies, and Philosophy at Bryn Mawr, John Jay College for Criminal Justice, SUNY at Old Westbury, Bronx Community College, Hofstra and The New School.

I currently teach an introduction to academic discourse, analytical reading and writing, playwriting, fiction and poetry at Temple University in Philadelphia. I have a dual appointment as

an Associate Professor in the English Department and in the Lewis Katz School of Medicine, where I teach medical students Yoga and Writing.

Having experienced four years of infertility, having both my parents die of cancer, having an Aunt with Alzheimer's disease, and a husband with an auto-immune disease, a daughter with Celiac's Disease, I am all too familiar with life's fragility and with the power of art, love and stories to heal us.

I believe in kindness, in the liberating power of laughter, in kvetching and stretching my way through this crazy, often unsettling life, which is our imperfect paradise.

The story of your life, of my life, they do not exist. The novel of my life, of our lives, yes, but not history. It is in the recovery of time by the imaginary that the breath is returned to life. ~

~Marguerite Duras.