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At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the beautiful Sydney Stringfellow begins an intense love affair with a German, but the affair abruptly ends when political forces tear them apart.

Bliss, Remembered: A Novel Details

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Author : Frank Deford

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From Reader Review Bliss, Remembered: A Novel for online ebook

Jane says

Bliss, Remembered by Frank Deford is the story of a mother with her own story to tell, and the son who patiently gives her time to tell it. Despite the fact that the author is also a sportswriter, this is not a book filled with sports action. The tale takes its time in the telling, allowing the reader to savor the language and the memories.

Sydney Stringfellow Branch, dying of cancer in 2004, invites her son to come watch the Athens Olympics with her. When he arrives, she reveals that she wants to tell him about her own trip to the Olympics, as a swimmer, in 1936. Throughout his 60 years, she has never talked to her son about this life-changing experience. The story of how she ended up in Berlin, Germany as a member of the United States Olympic team is revealed very slowly over the course of the novel.

The story flips back and forth between the 1930s and 2004. We hear the voice of Sydney and the voice of her son, Teddy. Real life figures such as Eleanor Holm (who won the 100-meter backstroke at the 1932 Olympics), Leni Riefenstahl (who documented the Olympics for Hitler) and Adolf Hitler make appearances throughout the tale. However, this story is not what one might expect from a novel written by a sportswriter about the 1936 Olympics. The focus is not on Hitler or World War II, and Jesse Owens is only briefly mentioned. The story is not depressing or horrific like so many books about the time period.

Before starting her story, Sydney intrigues her son and the reader by warning us to prepare ourselves: "There's some sex.... Some violence, too." But it's a long way into the story before we hear the full details. Teddy also learns more about the deceased father who, like his mother, had a subject he refused to discuss with his son – the battle of Guadalcanal in 1942.

Bliss, Remembered is a well-researched book. The details about the eastern shore of Maryland and New York in the early 1930s and the Berlin Olympics in 1936 ring true, as does the language used in the present and the past. Deford works in references to real people, places, and events in a believable way.

Bliss, Remembered contains some plot twists that knock at the door of incredulity but don't quite open it because the author successfully pulls us in. The story is so beautifully told that you just follow along.

Frank Deford is a fine, nuanced writer. If you like a book with secrets to reveal in its own sweet time, I recommend Bliss, Remembered.

Nicole Handy says

I decided I needed to give this four stars because I read it so fast--a day and a half. This book received the most votes for the Readers' Choice at our library. Although Frank Deford is (was?) a sports writer for Sports Illustrated, he actually does a decent job of writing this love story. There were a few parts when I knew that it was written by a man, but the story is well-written and not the typical WWII story either.

It is about a girl who goes to swim in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and ends up falling in love with a German

hunk. It is about her dreams to become an Olympic Champion and to also keep her relationship going. It is not explicitly about the war, but it is definitely set during depression and war times and that affect peoples' choices. Great ending.

Clare says

What a great read! I couldn't put it down. The history, the characters, the surprises, all of it wonderful.

Eddie says

I often listen to NPR and thoroughly enjoy doing so when I'm not in the mood for music or drop my IQ advertisements that come with commercial radio. Anyhow, ever so often, I'll catch some wonderful commentating on the world of sports by a guy named, Frank Deford. I listen and am in complete awe of his writing and his overall opinions that are expressed through such commentating. His writing, his voice, and his prose are just wonderful. So, one day while browsing through the library in the "new section," I came across a book called, Bliss, Remembered written by Frank Deford. I read the name and thought: I know this name, where have I heard this name? And it dawned on me, this the same guy that I so love hearing on NPR, I bet. So I raced to the back of the book and saw the very guy's, I so dearly love hearing, face and a short tidbit of info on him, which described that he actually is the very guy who does commentating on NPR. I knew instantly I had to pick up this book and read it. I also didn't know he was a well published author and this wasn't his first book, not even close. Anyhow, I took the book home and started to read it...

Well, lets just say I loved it and if you want to know more about it, well you don't need a description or synopsis from me. Read the description from Goodreads and if it strikes your curiosity at all, and you are wondering if it is worth the read, take it from me, it is.

Tara Chevestt says

This is a story about a young Maryland woman in 1936 who gets to be on the American Olympic swim team and go to Berlin for the games.. At the age of 82, she is telling her story for the first time to her son, Teddy. And what a story it is..

<http://wwwbookbabe.blogspot.com/2010/...>

Deborah says

I might have put this down had I not been obligated to lead a discussion on it, so I'm glad I had to stick with it. Not only does the action become intriguing, the pace picks up as the clunky point-of-view mechanics seem to smooth out. It's good, light entertainment with the bonus of a nice plot twist I didn't see coming, although Deford sets it up fairly, and some readers might indeed guess what's in the offing.

My early impatience with this book came because the author uses a maddening number of cliches in the

dialogue. I know that we all use them to a certain extent, but it felt like a very lazy way to characterize old-lady quaintness in his protagonist. Worse, though, was that so often when the elderly Sydney used a "big" word or outdated term, her son did a "whaaa..?" double-take. Another lazy way to advance the dialogue, I think, because this son is a 60-year-old English major, like me, and I got them all. Either that's an author's artifice, or Deford has a very low opinion of English teachers.

Did anyone else find Sydney's preoccupation with "bazooms" curious? It seems to me an amusing pitfall of this male sportswriter trying to write from a female POV.

Maybe I'm being a little hard on this author, because I admire his journalism and I did ultimately enjoy this book. I've rented Riefenstahl's "Olympia" from Netflix to use in our upcoming discussion, and it was fun to try to identify the fictional Horst in the torch run.

Abe says

At the 1936 Berlin Olympics the beautiful Sydney Stringfellow begins an intense love affair with a German but the affair abruptly ends when political forces tear them apart.

This is a book about love, romance, racism with the Berlin 1936 Olympics in the background. And it has unexpected violence. A well written novel.

Simon says

Exasperating as hell. DeFord starts with a fantastic premise, and then blows it through poor execution. You can see the ending about a mile away, and it just plods as you get to it.

However, it is a good read in the old-fashioned sense. This is not a novel with a message (other than that everything was better back in the days of the Greatest Generation, including the music and clothes --- and I agree with at least the latter two), it is sort of in the tradition of *Forever Amber*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Rebecca* and the other novels of the thirties and forties. You read it for the story, not the epic themes or the quality of the writing (characters are woefully undeveloped or downright clunky in execution --- Teddy has spent his life as a small-town theatre director? I don't think so, and I am in a position to pass judgment, having been one for forty years).

It is a decent time-killer. And it did send me off in search of information about Eleanor Holm. So there you go.

Sandy says

If you are willing to suspend absolute plausibility just a little, *Bliss Remembered* weaves a fascinating tale of Olympic swimming during the 1936 Berlin games. It's a sports story, a love story, and a mystery of sorts.

Even though the implausibility of parts of the story permeates the characters, I wanted to read the book and not put it down. I cared about the characters and the story, and it was an enjoyable read.

Dick Tatro says

If you are a NPR listener then you already know Frank Deford for his show "it is only a Game". If you are like me and read SI, then you know him as one of the great sports writers of our time. This book is a great one. Fiction set at one of the most compelling Olympics in History, the Nazi Olympics of 1936. Sydney Stringfellow is the story tell as she relates her adventure of a lifetime to her son. Sydney is dying of cancer in 2004 during the Athens Games, her son is telling us her story as she told him. It is thrilling, full of heroes and villains, love, lust, heartbreak and a shocking ending. It is without a doubt the most interesting fiction book I have ever read. It would make a super movie. You will fall in love with Sydney not as a young beautiful swimming star but as a old woman who has led a wonderful life. Deford also introduced me to a real person that I did not know but have since read much about. Eleanor Holm who was the best 100 meter backstroke in the world but was kicked out of the 1936 games and would later become a famous singer and played Jane in the Tarzan movies. This book is full of many things that remind me of the time my parents lived, the phrases they used, the life they lead. Any war baby or Baby boomer will like this book for just those memories. This is a great read.

Janet says

I absolutely love Frank Deford. So imagine my disappointment when, halfway through the book, I'm thinking to myself: this is a nice story but I'm really not feeling compelled to read it. I'm picturing myself giving it a 3-star review because although Deford's writing is superb as always, it's really not grabbing me. And Frank Deford ALWAYS gets my attention. Then I hit a certain point where things I didn't expect started happening and I couldn't wait to see where he was going with it. Okay, so it ends up being a great story. At the same time, some of the events really bothered me and I didn't understand - knowing what I know about Deford - not only why he included these seemingly unnecessary events, but also why he presented them the way he did. Things that are a really big deal are treated quite lightly; for example, in certain situations you expect a character to express a certain degree of remorse. Then the story just moves on without exploring that, and it's never brought up again. Then. THEN. Not being a gifted literary analyst, I had to finish the book and sleep on it before waking up in the morning with some insight. The questions Deford is asking in this novel are some of the most important questions that can be asked about life, love and eternity. Once again he has asked us to look at ourselves, our beliefs, how we treat other people, why we do anything we do, and more. Much more. He's a sneaky one, that Frank Deford.

Kerilynne says

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to this book. The dynamic between an older mother and her son was a hoot. Sydney's language from the 30's and her spark made the book even better. This was a great love story and a glimpse into pieces of the past like the Olympics and World War II. I feel like I want to read it again just write down all the phrases that were said that we no longer use.

Shomeret says

I won this book from a giveaway on my GR friend Tara's Book Babe blog. Then the publisher Overlook Press shipped it to me. So thank you very much Tara and Overlook Press.

I stayed up until 1AM to finish this book because it got so suspenseful toward the end. This is a book that chronicles the life of the fictional swimmer Sydney Stringfellow. She's really quite something. Sydney recounts her life to her son Teddy beginning with how she became a swimmer and ended up going to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. But it doesn't stop there. Her life during World War II doesn't go in the direction that she expected. (view spoiler)

The viewpoint of Sydney was marvelously honest and authentic. She used expressions from that period. I know this because my mother is from Sydney's generation. The voice of Teddy, the narrator, grated on me at first with his painfully correct English. Later I found out that Teddy is a teacher. He undoubtedly spent way too much time correcting the grammar in student compositions. As he got more into his mother's story, the narration also flowed better. On the whole I found Teddy believable and somewhat sympathetic. As I closed the book I wondered how much Teddy would share with his sister.

Debbie says

This book alternates between the present and the past as a mother, who is sick and about to die, begins to tell her grown son about her time in the Berlin Olympics in 1937 (hope that's the right year) during the reign of Hitler and right before World War II. She falls in love with a German man while she is there and then has to deal with losing him when she returns to the U.S. I liked the story, but I felt like the mother focused too much on how good looking she was back in the day. She describes her magnificent boobs, to her son, in a few different ways. I also got a little annoyed with how she would talk to her son when she is telling him the story. It's like the author wanted her to be a "hip" old woman and it doesn't seem believable. The ending also seemed a little improbable, but there are some interesting twists to the book. Overall, I would say it was an entertaining, easy read.

Bryan Young says

Frank Deford is a helluva writer and an American treasure and here he's crafted a love story, to sports, to the Olympics, but mostly to two young kids in love and without a clue in the world.

This book was not at all what I expected it to be, and was certainly different than I'd hoped, but I was treated with an incredibly well-told story regardless.

It flounders a bit in the middle, but it ties up so neatly it's easy to forgive.

