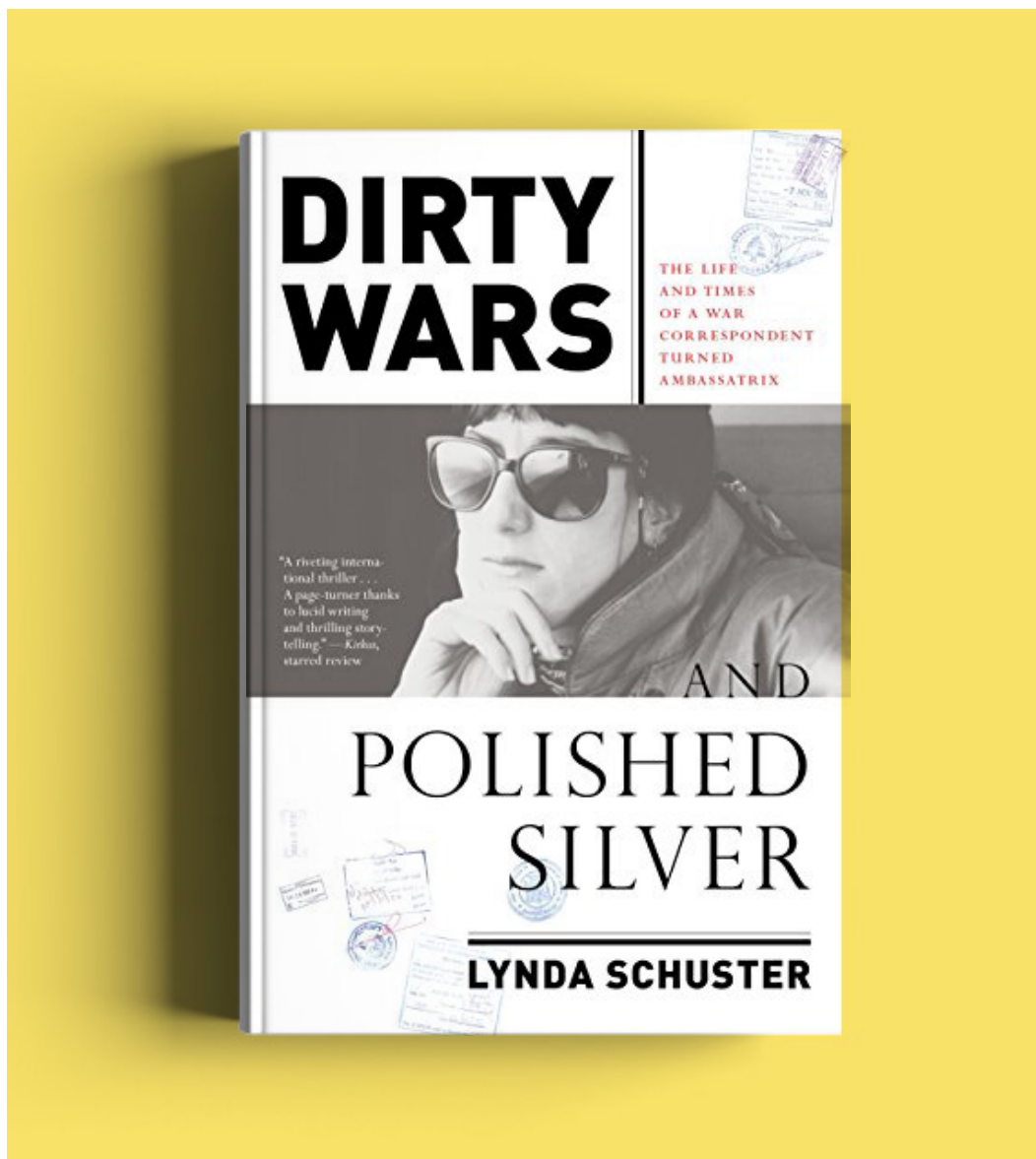


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

Created in partnership with Lynda Schuster
Jewishbookcouncil.org



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What Was Happening

Lynda traveled the world as a foreign correspondent and later with Dennis, her husband, an American diplomat. She spent time in some of the most complex geopolitical crises of the second half of the 20th century. So what was going on when Lynda was in...

Israel - 1973

Lynda's teenage rebellion brought her to a kibbutz in the north of Israel and, inadvertently, into the middle of the Yom Kippur War.

On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel. Hoping to reclaim land that was lost during the Six-Day War, Egypt and Syria struck Israel on the day that the country was observing Yom Kippur. The war lasted for three weeks, with Jordan and Iraq lending support to the Arab forces. Despite being unprepared and needing a few days to mobilize—and at a significant cost in casualties—Israel made sufficient enough gains that Egypt agreed to a ceasefire on October 25, 1973.

Central America - 1981

Lynda's first real chance at being a foreign correspondent came during the Central American conflicts of the 1980s. Civil wars in several of the countries led to political and economic instability in the region, and to worry in the U.S. that communist revolutions might spread. The U.S. was also concerned about access to the Panama Canal.

When Ronald Reagan came to office in 1980, his administration ramped up previous efforts to influence the situation in Central America. In El Salvador, the left-wing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front launched an offensive against the brutal Salvadoran military, which started the 12-year-long Salvadoran civil war. The Reagan White House blamed Cuba and the new government in Nicaragua, led by the socialist Sandinistas, who themselves had only recently overthrown the right-wing dictator, Anastasio Somoza.

The U.S. administration believed that the Sandinista regime was exporting terror to El Salvador; in retaliation, Reagan began supporting anti-Nicaraguan guerrilla militias, known as the Contras. The Contras, many of whom were former members of Somoza's vicious Nicaraguan National Military, trained in Honduras. This is why Dial was in Honduras, looking to meet with the Contras (p. 97, 111).

Given the prevailing concern about U.S. military involvement, Reagan had to fight Congress to obtain support for the Contras. Congress ultimately prohibited military aid and sanctioned only non-lethal support; the White House nonetheless continued to provide arms clandestinely, which led to the Iran-Contra scandal.

After hundreds of thousands of deaths and years of instability, a number of Latin American countries banded together to form the Contadora group and work for peace in the region.

For more information:

[Office of the Historian: Central America, 1981–1993](#)

[IPFS: Central American Crisis](#)

Lebanon - 1984

After Dial's death, Lynda was transferred to the Middle East to cover Lebanon's Civil War, which lasted from 1975–1990. The war divided the multi-ethnic country along religious and sectarian lines, with the primary opponents being Muslims—including Palestinians who poured into Lebanon after the creation of Israel and later after the Six-Day War—and Maronite Christians. Involvement from Syria, Israel, the Soviets, and the U.S. further complicated

the situation. The war decimated the country and left over 100,000 dead.

For more information:

PBS: [Future for Lebanon Lebanon's Divisive Sectarian Past: Civil War](#)

BBC: [Lebanon profile - Timeline](#)

Office of the Historian: [The Reagan Administration and Lebanon, 1981–1984](#)

Wikipedia: [Lebanese Civil War](#)

The New York Times: [University Head Killed in Beirut \(1984\)](#)

[These photos show how everyday life continued at the heart of Lebanon's brutal civil war](#)

(While in Lebanon, Lynda says that she tried to “concentrate on writing about some of the hundreds of thousands of ordinary people caught in the middle of the conflict” (p 118). The pictures in the link above are examples of what she may have seen.)

YouTube: [Beirut Lebanon 1984 US Marine Corps](#) (This video was taken around the same time that Lynda was in Lebanon.)

Malawi and South Africa - 1986

Dennis' first international post after he and Lynda meet is in Malawi. Malawi has been inhabited continuously for the past 12,000 years, originally by nomadic tribes. References to Malawi, then Maravi, appear in Arab and Portuguese writings of the 17th and 18th centuries; toward the end of the 1800s, increasing numbers of European missions began appearing, led by the Scottish African Lakes Company. After a number of years of instability and fighting against local tribes, Britain declared the country the British Protectorate of Nyasaland in 1891.

Britain governed the area with a policy of indirect rule, but in 1953 created the Central African Federation, which joined Nyasaland (Malawi) with Northern and Southern Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe). This federation faced strong local opposition, which was led by Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Banda and others were arrested, and the government declared a state of emergency in 1959.

Banda was released from prison in 1960 and founded the Malawi Congress Party, which won the majority

of seats in subsequent elections. Malawi became self-governing in 1963, with the MCP as the sole political party and Banda as prime minister. It became an independent Commonwealth country in 1964. Banda was installed by a rubber-stamp Parliament as president with widespread powers and subsequently made President-for-Life in 1971. He ruled with an iron hand, imprisoning or assassinating any opposition, until the early 1990s.

While Dennis was stationed in Malawi, Lynda was based in South Africa, writing about the political situation and the underground resistance to apartheid. Apartheid (meaning “separateness” in Afrikaans) was the system of institutional racism that was the official policy of South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s.

Apartheid was condemned internationally and there was, of course, significant internal resistance. This resistance took the form of non-violent protests, demonstrations, strikes and the creation of political parties, among others. After the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960—in which police opened fired on black protesters, killing 69 people—the African National Congress and the Pan-African Congress established military wings. The ruling white National Party government banned these groups and jailed activist leaders, including Nelson Mandela, who was imprisoned from 1963-1990. The Soweto uprising in 1976, when thousands of black school children rioted, resulted in another widespread crackdown by the government, which set out to suppress all resistance movements and divide communities so as to weaken them.

Anti-apartheid groups recognized that they would need to adopt new methods and flexible structures to survive and be effective. In 1983, the United Democratic Front, a loose grouping of churches, civic associations, labor- and student unions, all working against apartheid, began to coalesce. The UDF continued to play an important role in mass actions throughout the 1980s. In turn, the government responded with bans, arrests and a state of emergency that led to mass imprisonments, torture, and many deaths.

For more information:

BBC: [Profile of Malawi](#) (timeline)

The Commonwealth: [History of Malawi](#)

Nations Encyclopedia: [History of Malawi](#)

Algemeiner: [Israeli-born Malawi Parliament member wants change through action](#)

SA History: [Apartheid in the 1980s](#)

History Channel: [Apartheid](#)

YouTube: [Toyi Toyo Dance](#) (a video of the toyi-toyi dance that Lynda witnesses on the train in South Africa on p. 176)

Liberia - 1989

Lynda and Dennis arrived in Liberia—Africa’s oldest republic and the only sub-Saharan state that was never subjected to colonial rule—shortly before the onset of the First Liberian Civil War, which ran from 1989-1997. The war began with the December incursion into Liberia by Charles Taylor, who entered from the Ivory Coast. Taylor, a former government minister, and his forces, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), wanted to unseat President Samuel Doe.

Doe, who had come to power after leading a coup in 1980, was the first indigenous head-of-state in a country that had been founded in the early 1800s by the American Colonization Society for freed former slaves and free blacks from America. While he expanded Liberia’s economy, he also ran a corrupt and oppressive regime and discriminated against ethnic groups that were not his own, namely the Gios and Manos.

Taylor initially entered Liberia with a small number of rebels in December of 1989, but thousands joined his NPFL. Doe’s response was brutal, and solidified the war as an ethnic one between loyalist Krahns and Gios and Manos.

By July of 1990, Taylor’s forces had reached Monrovia and laid siege to the city, along with the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia, which had splintered off from the NPFL and became a rival rebel group. The U.S. Navy evacuated thousands of foreign

nationals and officials in August; Doe was captured by the IPFL and killed in September. Despite intervention and peace attempts by the Economic Community of West African States, the war continued for years. Hundreds of thousands of people are estimated to have died because of the conflict.

For more information:

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian: [Founding of Liberia](#)

Britannica: [Liberia](#)

Mozambique - 1994

Dennis’ posting as the U.S. ambassador to Mozambique comes just a year after the end of the Mozambican Civil War. The war began in 1976, two years after Mozambique gained independence from Portugal, and lasted until 1992. It was classified as an internal war between the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) forces, but Cold War politics and agendas of outside countries came into play as well. Over the fifteen years of fighting, both sides were accused of atrocious human rights violations, including the use of child soldiers; approximately 1 million people died of war-related causes.

With pressure from the Catholic Church and the Mozambican Church Council and a collapse in external funding from the Soviets and South Africa, peace talks began in 1990; a cease-fire was signed in 1992.

In 1994, Mozambique held its first democratic elections. Although the voting was overseen by an international observers, RENAMO pulled out of the election hours before polls opened, and the head of FRELIMO stated he would not concede if the results showed that he had not won. Despite widespread concern about a return to war, the elections took place. And while FRELIMO remained the governing party, RENAMO did win close to 40% of the Parliamentary seats.

For more information:

The Forward: [In Mozambique, a Very Small Jewish Community Thrives](#)

Jewish Virtual Library: [Mozambique Jewish History Tour](#)

Tufts University: [Mozambique Civil War](#)

The New York Times: [Mozambique's First Free Election](#)

Peru - 1996

From 1980 to 2000, Peru faced internal conflicts between the government and guerilla forces that led to the deaths of approximately 70,000 Peruvians. In the late 1960s, Professor Abimael Guzman founded the Shining Path, a group that grew into a guerilla army of over 10,000 members. Guzman wanted to overthrow the government and replace it with a revolutionary regime that would provide more opportunities to indigenous Peruvians. The Shining Path, along with other leftist groups, including the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), fought against both government forces and each other for control of the country. It was the MRTA that created the hostage situation in the Japanese ambassador's home, from which Dennis just barely escaped. Ann Patchett's novel, *Bel Canto*, is a fictionalized version of the event and is being made into a movie.

For more information:

Center for Justice and Accountability: [Peru](#)

Lima Easy: [Peruvian Political History](#)

The New York Times: [Peruvian Hostage Crisis](#)

History: [Peruvian Rebels Seize Japanese Ambassador's Home](#)

World Jewish Congress: [Peru](#)

Jewish Virtual Library: [Peru Jewish History Tour](#)

Discussion Questions

Questions were provided by Lynda Schuster

1. In the book's prologue, Lynda writes that war would come to dominate her existence both as a reporter and as a wife. To what extent do you think that was driven by choice and to what extent was it the result of chance?
2. How would you react if your teenager announced that she/he were moving to another part of the world, especially one as dangerous as the Middle East?
3. Where did Lynda's motivation to seek a life of adventure, "through the eye of a needle," if necessary, come from? Was it simply a rebellion against what she perceived as her mother's staid housewife's existence? Do you see the fraught relationship between her parents as part of her motivation?
4. Discuss Lynda's use of humor in coping with both dangerous and tragic events.
5. What did you think of the May/December relationship between Dial and Lynda?
6. Does Dial's murder change Lynda? If so, in what ways?
7. Was there anything about Lynda's description of working as a foreign correspondent that was surprising or a revelation? Do you think that being a woman in that profession is an advantage? Disadvantage? How do you think the profession has changed with the advent of the Internet and social media?
8. Discuss Lynda's decision to give up daily journalism to marry Dennis. Was this surprising?
9. How did you feel about Lynda's difficulties in adjusting to life as a diplomatic spouse? What did you think of the two-week course that she referred to as "Ambassatrix School"? Was your understanding of diplomatic life changed by her stories?
10. Discuss Lynda's relationship with Simcha, her "kibbutz mother," versus that with her actual mother. How would you feel if your child maintained such a relationship?
11. Was Lynda's sudden desire for a child unexpected? Did it change her? Her relationship with her mother? The book ends with Lynda worrying about her daughter in Israel; does this mean that her life has come full circle?
12. How does Lynda's memoir differ from others you have read? Which stories will stay with you? Which do you wish she had expanded further?

Lebanese Baba Ganoush

Being in a new country affords the opportunity to learn about new cultures, customs, and of course, foods! Here are some of Lynda's favorite dishes from her travels.

adapted from [Mama's Lebanese Kitchen](#)



Ingredients

3 lbs eggplant

5 Tbl tahini

juice of 1 lemon

3 cloves of garlic, crushed

1 Tbl white vinegar

1 Tbl extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp salt (or to taste)

1. Prick the skin of the eggplants and roast them in the oven at 450 degrees for approximately 40 minutes, until tender throughout the interior.

2. While the eggplants are still warm, peel off the skin, and discard as seeds (as much as possible).

3. Allow to rest in a colander for ten minutes to strain out excess water.

4. Add eggplants to a food processor with the remaining ingredients. Run the processor for 2-3 minutes until ingredients are well combined and smooth. Adjust salt to taste.

Photo credit: [Wikimedia Commons/avlxyz](#)

Malawian Chambo

This recipe is courtesy of [International Cuisine.com](http://InternationalCuisine.com)

Lynda recommends any recipe with tilapia, which is native to Lake Malawi and called chambo. (And tastes so much better than farm raised!)

Ingredients

- 4 tilapia filets
- lemon juice
- flour
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 Tbl Malawi curry spice (see below)
- 1 cup water
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1/4 fruit chutney, divided (see below)

1. Sprinkle the tilapia with salt and lemon juice, then dredge them in flour.
2. Heat 1/4 cup of oil in a pan and fry the fish, then remove filets and set them aside.
3. Add chopped onion to the pan and saute about 5 minutes until translucent. Mix in the curry spice, and continue to saute for an additional 2 minutes.
4. Pour 1 1/2 cups of water into the pan, and stir.
5. Add in the carrots and peppers, and reduce heat. Simmer about 10 minutes until the vegetables are tender.
6. Stir in the fruit chutney.

7. Place the fish fillets back in the pan, and cover with sauce. Remove from the heat, and cover the pan. Allow the fish to rest in the gravy for a few minutes, then serve.

Malawi curry spice:

10 dried hot red chiles like peri peri or thai- seeds removed, 3 Tbl coriander seeds, 1 Tbl black peppercorns, 3 Tbl poppy seeds, 2 tsp black mustard seeds, 1 Tbl cumin seeds, 1 Tbl turmeric, 2 tsp ground cinnamon, 10 whole cloves

Grind together to create a fine powder

Malawian Fruit Chutney:

Yields 1 quart

4 large fresh peaches, 1 cup dried apricots, 1 cup raisins, 2 large diced red onions

2 cups sugar, 2 tsp chili powder, 2 tsp ground coriander, 2 tsp salt

Soak the dried apricots in boiling water for an hour until plump and rehydrated. Drain the bowl, reserving the water, and chop apricots into small pieces. Peel and chop the peaches. Pour the reserved soaking water into a saucepan and add all of the ingredients to the pan. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer for about an hour, stirring occasionally. Allow to cool before storing in an airtight container for up to two weeks.

Liberian Jollof Rice

adapted from [West Africa Cooks](#)

Jollof rice is a specialty of West Africa, and versions of this can be found in Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, and Senegal, among other countries. It is a tomato based spiced rice dish.



Ingredients

3 cups raw rice

1 cup water

3 lbs chicken or chicken and beef

6 oz of smoked turkey, diced

1 medium chopped onion

1 chopped green pepper

2 cups of frozen mixed vegetables

1/2 head of cabbage, chopped

2 tsp salt

2 tsp seasoned salt

1/2 tsp ground black pepper

14 oz. can of diced tomatoes

1. Cut up chicken (or meat) into 1 inch pieces, and sprinkle with 1 tsp each of the salt and seasoning salt. Heat oil and saute in a large skillet until cooked through. Set aside.

2. Wipe out the skillet, and add 1 Tbl oil. When oil is heated, saute onions until they are translucent.

3. Add can of tomatoes, mixed vegetables, peppers, remaining salt and seasoning salt, ground pepper, and 1 cup of water. Stir together, then add in chicken (or beef) and smoked turkey. Cook on medium heat for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

4. Parboil the rice, cooking it until it is about halfway cooked. Rinse and drain the rice, then transfer rice to a 9x 13 baking pan.

5. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

6. Add cabbage to the rice and mix well. Pour in sauce, a little at a time so that rice is just covered but not too liquidy.

7. Cover the pan with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes. Stir, and add more sauce if rice seems dry. Replace the foil cover and bake for another 15 minutes until rice is cooked through.

Photo credit: [Wikimedia Commons/DromoTetteh](#)

Piri-piri Chicken

adapted from [Epicurious](#)

Ingredients

Glaze-

- 3 Tbl oil
- 3 Tbl chopped cilantro
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 Tbl piri-piri sauce or other hot sauce
- 2 Tbl fresh lemon juice

Chicken -

- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 2-in piece of ginger, peeled and sliced
- 1 large shallot, peeled and quartered
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1/2 cup piri-piri sauce or other hot sauce
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp coarse kosher salt
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 3 1/2-4 lb chicken, spatchcocked

1. Make the glaze. Heat oil in a small saucepan, and cook the garlic and cilantro for about 2 minutes, until

Piri-piri peppers were brought to Mozambique and Angola by the Portuguese when they colonized that area. Lynda warns that this is a spicy dish!

garlic is browned. Add in piri-piri sauce and lemon juice, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer for 2 minutes. Set aside.

2. Make the marinade by chopping the cilantro, ginger, shallot, and garlic in a food processor, then adding piri-piri sauce, 1/4 cup of oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Process to blend.

3. Pour half of the marinade in the bottom of a pan, and place flattened chicken skin side up. Marinate in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours or overnight, turning occasionally.

4. Roast at 450 degrees for about 45 minutes, until chicken is done. (Alternatively, grill on medium with a drip pan for about 40 minutes). Pour warm glaze over the chicken, carve and serve.

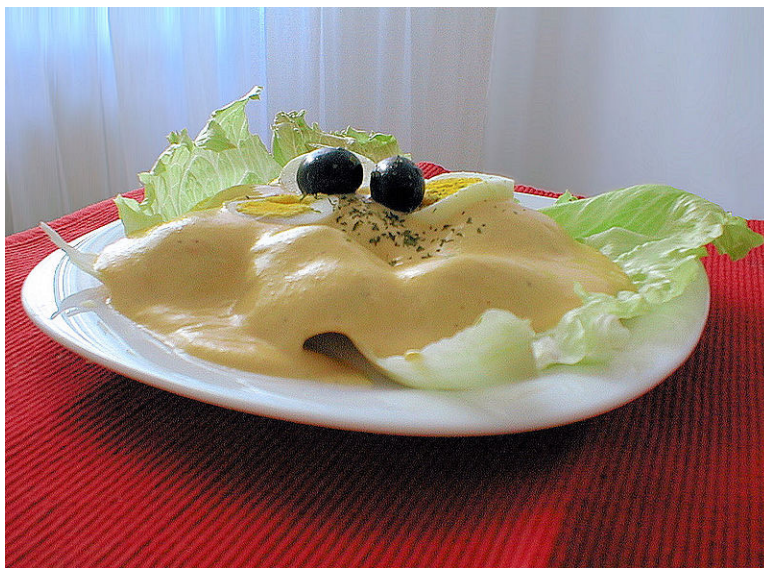


Photo credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#)/Ossewa/Piri-piri sauce in Mozambique

Papa a la Huancaína

adapted from [Peru Delights](#)

When asked about a favorite dish from Peru, Lynda answered, “Ceviche, of course! Or papas huancaínas. Or anything with yucca.” This potato dish is a lesser known than ceviche, but looks delicious!



Ingredients

1/2 cup of aji amarillo paste*

2 Tbl oil

1 cup evaporated milk

4 Saltine crackers

8 oz. queso fresco

salt

6 yellow potatoes

Garnish: iceberg lettuce, black olives, sliced hard-boiled eggs, parsley

*Aji amarillo paste can found in specialty stores, online, or can be [made from scratch using this recipe](#))

1. Put the aji amarillo paste in a blender, and add oil and milk. Blend with crackers, queso fresco, and salt until smooth.
2. Boil potatoes in salted water until tender. Remove the skins, and slice thickly.
3. Serve the potatoes with the sauce and garnishes.

Photo credit: [Wikimedia Commons/Feralbt](#)

Notes from Book Clubs

After *Dirty Wars* and *Polished Silver* came out, Lynda Schuster traveled to numerous events and book groups, speaking with readers. Here are some of the comments from book groups, about what most interested them, questions that were raised, and the discussions that were generated from reading the book.

From Susan Huvad, a coordinator of Northfield, IL HBI Conversations:

Some of the most interesting questions from our meeting concerned the inner workings of the embassies. How do US ambassadors interact with other US officials in the country they are posted in? How does the US ambassador interact with other countries' ambassadors in the same country? We were interested in the differences between career State Department officials acting as ambassadors vs the role of "major donor" ambassadors. What is expected of an "ambassatrix"? We were curious about what happens to indigenous embassy staff during severe political upheaval against the US presence in a country.

From Susan Flax Posner, a coordinator of Baltimore HBI Conversations:

I think that the most important question raised was how Lynda came to terms with her own mother only after she became a mother, and Noa presented her with some of the same issues and questions Lynda had raised when she was a child. Lynda explained that she didn't want the same life as her mom when she was growing up yet after she became a mother, Noa gave her a new way to look at her mother. In essence, motherhood afforded her the opportunity to reexamine her own youthful rebellion through a new prism.

From Marian Ehrlich, coordinator of Sarasota HBI Conversations:

Lynda Schuster, author of *Dirty Wars* and *Polished Silver* presented her memoir to our group of 45 women in February 2018. Lynda is a delight. She grabbed everyone's interest from the moment I introduced her. Lynda is open, honest, clear, and articulate. I think many women in our group related to the generational mother/daughter relationship theme that came full circle in our conversation of Lynda's book. Lynda's life is intense and we are thrilled that she provided insights into intimate portions of her journey.

Q&A with Author Lynda Schuster

You've been writing professionally your whole career — how was writing this book different/similar to what you'd done in the past? How long had you been planning to write a book about your experiences? Did you have notes or diaries that you used to write *Dirty Wars and Polished Silver*?

Lynda Schuster: For a journalist or non-fiction writer such as myself, crafting a memoir is a rather odd experience. How does one report out or research one's own life? I suddenly found myself on the other side of the looking glass, as it were. (To say nothing of feeling sympathy for all those poor people who had ever been subjected to my journalistic interrogations.) To make matters worse, I was trying to write of events that had happened, in some cases, forty-five years earlier. And the compulsive fact-checker in me couldn't always track down multiple instances of corroboration.

I found a kind of solution in Joachim Fest's memoir, *Not I*, his truly remarkable tale of growing up in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s in an anti-Nazi family that I was reading at the time. In the book, I came across a powerful paragraph that I decided to use as one of the epigraphs of my book:

One does not, in retrospect, record what one has experienced, but what time—with its increasing shifts in perspective, with one's own will to shape the chaos of half-buried experiences—has made of it. By and large, one records less how it actually was than how one became who one is.

That, to me, seemed the essence of memoir: trying to explain how one became who one is. Which is differ-

ent from biography, whose work is to lay down the facts of a life. Of course, because I can't stay serious for more than five minutes, I just had to juxtapose Fest's words with Nora Ephron's famous assertion: "Everything is copy."

I still tried to corroborate events as much as possible, but using Fest's interpretation as a guideline, I learned to settle, if necessary, for just two sources instead of three. Which meant have to disconnect part of my brain, the default journalist part—not an easy thing to do. Thus, in the sections of the book about growing up in Detroit, I relied on letters and other things I had written to my parents that came into my possession after they passed away. I also talked at length with my sisters and read contemporaneous accounts of the city.

Likewise, in the section of the book about Dial: I have a box filled with his love letters, newspaper clippings about his death, piles of condolence letters from people around the world. I also kept all my notebooks from my reporting in Central America and Mexico, as well as the clips of my stories published in the *Wall Street Journal*. So it was relatively easy to recreate that time. What was hard was re-reading, and thus re-living, everything. I hadn't read his letters, nor about the details of his death, in decades. As you can imagine, it was very, very difficult to write that section.

For subsequent chapters, I had my notebooks from reporting in the Middle East, South America, and South Africa. I used the diaries I kept as a diplomatic spouse, as well as photos and background material of the countries we lived in and the workbooks from

Ambassatrix School (many of whose lessons I failed). And I obviously had a fabulous resource in my husband, Dennis.

What has become of Tenson? Did he stay in the United States?

LS: Tenson and part of his family came with us when we initially returned to the U.S. after the Peru posting. Once back in the States, I told Dennis that I didn't want Noa to grow up as the "ambassador's daughter." Nor did I want to be worrying constantly about her safety and ours, living as American diplomats abroad. And I needed a Jewish community. So Dennis left the Foreign Service—not an easy thing for him to do after twenty-seven years, but for which I am deeply grateful. He was hired first as a dean by the University of Florida, then by Penn State University.

Living in the States, it quickly became clear that Tenson's services were a luxury we no longer needed; seven-hundred-person cocktail parties just weren't de rigueur in Gainesville. And American grocery stores, not to mention microwave ovens, are things of wonder. So Tenson, a man of great talent and ambition, ultimately found work as a chef in a Florida restaurant.

What is your favorite question to be asked about the book?

LS: I have a few favorite questions. One of them—and among the most frequently asked—is about Simcha, my kibbutz mother. I'm happy to report that Sim is very much alive and kicking in the Upper Galil—and just as bloody-minded and ornery as ever. In fact, I spoke with her at length by telephone while researching the book. Then one day, without any warning, a large envelope arrived at my house, stuffed with all the letters I had written to her. Over forty years' worth of missives! I had no idea that she had kept all my letters over the years, nor did I know that she would pull them out of the box from under her bed and send them to me. As you can imagine, they were a treasure trove of material, spanning the very time period about which I was writing.

I'm also happy to report that Noa has become Sim's honorary granddaughter (Sim's term), something very important to Noa after my mother died—suddenly and unexpectedly—about a dozen years ago. Noa did a gap year in Israel after graduating from high school and spent time on the *meshek* (kibbutz); she—like I—finds it a place of great beauty. Dennis, Noa and I try to visit as often as we can.

What habits or lessons have stayed with you from your time as a foreign correspondent and as an Ambassatrix?

LS: I think one of the lessons of living abroad both as a journalist and as an ambassatrix is just how unbelievably fortunate we are in this country. The poverty I witnessed in developing countries was, at times, almost beyond comprehension. And I'm talking about some of life's most basic necessities. In many African countries, for instance, women who live in rural areas that lack piped water must walk, quite literally, several miles every day lugging heavy containers to find sources of water. (And it's always the women who do this onerous task!) Besides the obvious physical burden, just consider for a moment how utterly time-consuming such an exercise is. And that's just for starters. When you add in food scarcities—especially during the dry season, what's known as the "hungry season"—and lack of even basic medical care and access to medicines, our lives here can seem positively charmed.

I feel this sense of extreme fortune extends to the political realm, as well. We haven't experienced a war on our soil for generations; as such, we haven't known the horror, with bombs exploding in the distance or machete-wielding rebels bearing down on our homes, of grabbing whatever it is we can think of in the moment and, with our families, making a dash for it. Never knowing when, or even if, we'll return. I have witnessed such scenes, both as a journalist and as an ambassatrix. Fear is the animating emotion in these moments: fear of what one is fleeing from, fear of what lies ahead. Something that we are very blessed not to have known.

Related Reads

On Being the Spouse of A Diplomat

Diplomat Magazine: [The Role of the Spouse](#)

The New York Times: [The Ambassador's Wife Is an Ambassador Too](#)

The Independent: [Brigid Keenan on Life as an Ambassador's Wife](#)

The Telegraph: [Being an Ambassador's Wife Is Not All Luxury Compounds, Gin, and Affairs](#)

Diplopundit: [The Role of the Ambassador's Wife](#)

The Washington Diplomat: [Four Wives and a Husband Talk About Life as a Diplomatic Spouse](#)

Impakter: [Diary of a Diplomat's Wife](#)

Christian Science Monitor: [Foreign Service Wives Seek Recognition for Their Diplomatic Work](#)

Illustradolife: [Diplomatic Spouses: Mother, Wife, De Facto Public Servant](#)

U.S. Department of State: [Protocol for the Modern Diplomat from the Foreign Service Institute of the State Department](#)

(this would be something like what Lynda received at Ambassatrix School)

Articles on Dial:

Lenny Letter: [Finally Telling My Daughter About My First Husband...and His Death](#)

The New York Times: [Two Slain US Journalists Flown to Honduran Capital](#)

Books

A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid by Lynda Schuster (Ohio University Press, 2006) is the book that Lynda was writing while living in Africa.

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett (Harpers, 2005) is a novel based on the Peruvian hostage crisis at the Japanese embassy, and adapted into a movie in 2018.

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