

Lynne Golodner – ‘Two Worlds’

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North Shore, Oahu

Winter waves thunder against a quiet landscape. Clash and combine, an angry swirl of blues lifting up and crashing down, and I watch it all from the safe, solid land.

I've been in Hawaii for two days, my third visit in two years. I meet Israelis at the Waialea farmers market. *Shabbat Shalom*, they say. Sun-kissed and smiling—how do they smile when the world is against us? Jewish, but I blend, maybe they do too. Is that why I'm here in the lonely cold Pacific when it's winter where I live? Since October 7th, I wear a filigreed Jewish star everywhere I go. Some call it brave, but I won't hide. "I love your *mogen David*," the woman says, and I smile, run my finger over the grooves.

I am not afraid to publicly be a Jew. I pay ten dollars for key lime pie made from their hens' eggs and limes fresh off their trees. I didn't want the pie, but I am so heartened to meet Jews in the windswept mountains that I eat it in the car, and it is every bit as good as they promised.

As I drive away, I wonder if they came this far from their native land to escape the politics of being Israeli. Of being Jewish. I say politics, fuming that Jews can't live in our native land peacefully. But then, can anyone keep a native land? Colonizing on identity is one historical constant. I used to love the idea of America as a melting pot, but now I cringe at the notion of blending identities until you can't see a single one clearly.

Here, there is constant motion. Locals promise hikes will be easy, but I'm out of breath on every climb. Ahead of me on the ascending trail, people look like the little pointillist dots of Impressionist paintings. *Are we going all the way up there?* My son nods. I walk toward the fear. The trail is steep and quiet, windy, with rust-colored dirt and plants green from recent rains. I go as far as I can, then watch as my son climbs higher.

We always want our kids to surpass us.

Honolulu

Outside the art museum, nene birds and white terns call from under yellow hibiscus. A midday rain shatters a bright sun. In a courtyard, a meditation of flat stones and calm water, Koi still in a clear pool. Scholars' rocks emit chi energy, what Hawaiians call *mana*. The sound of the word, *mah-na*, reminds me of the food God promised the Israelites in the desert all those many years of wandering. If they believed enough, food would appear, and the rabbis say it tasted like whatever they loved most.

In Hawaii, lotus flowers grow out of the mud. The docent says an Eastern perspective on beauty prioritizes flaws and fragility, not perfection or symmetry. I want to adopt a new definition of beauty for myself.

Hawaii is a small place, isolated, a *mélange* of traditions and legacies and lore. But the museum is world class, exhibits connecting artists according to themes, finding ways for everything together in one place to make sense.

There are many artists I know and yet I learn new things whenever I stop to read a plaque, stare at a canvas. Like, Modigliani was Jewish. Also, Camille Pissarro, the father of Impressionism. "Morning, Winter Sunshine, Frost, The Pont-Neuf, The Seine, The Louvre," in a gilded frame in Honolulu, the pinks and lavenders of sunrise soft against the gleaming waters of the most famous river in the world.

Outside, tropical birds are singing.

Everywhere & Nowhere

I've always wanted something to believe in. At 15, I dated a Christian boy who chewed tobacco. He took me to Red Lobster on a date and I wanted to love him, to love my rebellion, but he was only ordinary. Maybe I was too, though I didn't want to believe it. In college, I fell in love with a Jewish man who kept kosher by not ordering cheese on his McDonald's burgers. Then, I fell in love with a Catholic man. For a time, the priest's homily spoke to me, a Jew in a church pew on a cold Sunday. *How can you be so Jewish if you don't know anything about it?* the boyfriend asked. I was offended at the truth of his question, so I started learning the meaning behind my ancient traditions, desperate to understand how we've survived thousands of years.

I think it's in the words. The comforting texture of text. People of the Book. Walk into any synagogue, the curling lilt of Hebrew, the music of the words, and I am home.

My father said books were knowledge and you could never have too much. It's why I have no self-restraint in a bookstore. In downtown Honolulu, my son and I traipse into Native Books, buy a stack of new titles. At the counter, I pretend not to see the *Free Palestine Forever* sign, concoct a story in my head for how misguided the proprietors must be. Three months after

the biggest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, I rationalize: *they believe this is a fight for indigeneity*, but you can't logic your way out of blind hatred. Kicked out of Europe, we went home to the cracked earth of our ancient land and made it bloom. Now, they're telling us to *go back* to Poland. A shuffling mass of black shoes on a dusty road migrating back and forth forever, a Sisyphean Hell.

A good half century of believing we could blend is all we get. I pay for the books and drive into the sunset, rainbows arcing across the sky.

Viva La Revolution

Impressionism began in France in the 1800s. Rebel-painters took art-making outside, beyond sketchbooks and memory. Art from life, everyday life as art. Pissarro's real name was Jacob Abraham Camille; six of his seven children painted, making the world softer, more colorful, easier to accept.

Art imitating life? Or projecting onto canvas a portrait of what we dream life could be.

At first, the art world rejected Impressionism. Like with all new things, they argued that real life was too ugly, too dirty, not worth remembering. The soft hues were too optimistic, too pretty.

It's hard to be a revolutionary. The music journalist Eve Barlow says she doesn't mind being canceled, but I'm not sure I believe her. All of us pro-Israel Jews are paring down, ending friendships, crying over Instagram posts, double-locking our doors at night, screaming that it isn't fair. But didn't our parents tell us: *life isn't fair*? Why are we surprised?

I love the Impressionists—the softness of their colors, the optimism of their palettes. When I was a little girl, I adored Edgar Degas. His ballerinas, his soft strokes, his scenes with stories I wanted to inhabit. I didn't know that he hated Jews even while being one of Pissarro's earliest supporters. For a time, even, Pissarro preferred Degas over any other painter.

All the best artists of the time were Jew-haters. It was in vogue, really.

The lines between love and hate are easy to blur.

Hiking in Hawaii

I climb two volcanic mountains in Oahu. In the beginning, I breathe hard and my face reddens in the sun. My son is patient, though he'd like to go faster. I never hiked a mountain until I was an adult. I am so far from the person I once was.

At some point, the climb gets easier, and I no longer need to stop. My steps quicken, my breathing is easy, and I focus on the beauty of the range's backbone, the lush greenery, the damp path. I no longer worry about my ability to go higher or wonder if I even want to.

The Nazis stole many Pissarro originals from Jews. Since the war ended, the paintings show up in the oddest places, often with inaccurate labels. Courts restore ownership where they can, to preserve the artist's legacy, but not everyone wants to right a wrong. Pissarro sold few paintings in his lifetime. Now, they go for millions.

My son likes ridge hikes the best. The slopes are rolling green, against the sharp rise of mountainsides. On my second hike, I make the climb in record time, reach the highest point and stand in the whipping wind.

I used to believe clouds were drawn by angels. *Look, the white feathering against a light blue sky, an angel wing watching over us.* I felt the energy of the pulsing sky, and knew the world existed in ways I couldn't explain. I yearned to live on a deeper level than the apparent world. Maybe it was an escape story.

I keep saying "we" as if this is happening to me, as if I'm persecuted, as if I am unsafe, but I haven't ever been, really. I live in a quiet suburb with enough money and a spacious house. I wear my Jewish stars, and no one says a word. I fear the inevitable wrath, but it's just shouting from social media posts and newspaper headlines. No angry voices are directed at me, at least not that I can hear. Does anyone see me? Am I really here? Maybe I think I'm more important than I am.

I steer clear of neighborhoods where Jews aren't welcome—I have the freedom to do that.

So, is the hatred real? Is it alive? Or a fabrication, a story, a clever painting, an imagined landscape? The breath caught in my chest—for what?

On the mountaintop, I don't think about the vast sky, only everything under it, awed by how far I can see, and how far I have yet to go.

Lynne Golodner is the award-winning, bestselling author of 11 books and hundreds of essays and articles as well as a marketing expert, writing coach and retreat leader. After working as a journalist in New York and Washington, D.C., and earning an MFA in poetry, Lynne returned to her hometown of Detroit.