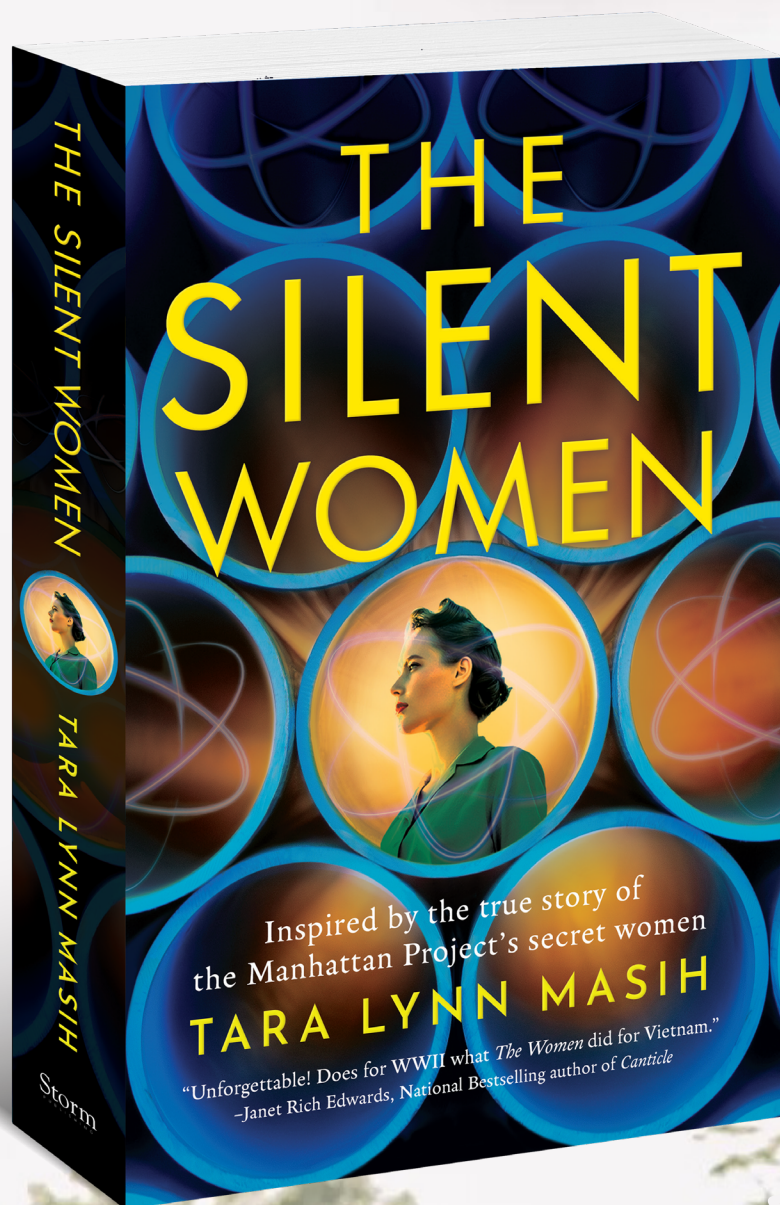


# THE SILENT WOMEN

## ..... READER'S GUIDE .....



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# CAST OF CHARACTERS

..... *from* **THE SILENT WOMEN** .....

## **MAIN CHARACTERS**

**Song Holloway**

**Verse Holloway** (brother)

**John (JM) Holloway** (father)

**Pearl Varnell** (mother)

**Beatrice (Bea) Varnell** (aunt)

**Judith Miller** (friend to Bea)

**Dorothy Clifton Varnell** (grandmother)

**Patrick Varnell** (grandfather)

## **ANDOVER**

**Mr. McCoy and Mrs. McCoy**

**Kate McCoy**

**Lucas McCoy**

**Mr. Angelo Marino**  
and **Mrs. Lucia Marino**

**Viviana Marino**

**Tommaso Marino**

**King Field**

**Mrs. Wolff**

## **FLORIDA**

**Akerman Citrus and Flower Farm**

**Mr. Storm Akerman**  
and **Mrs. Eleanor Akerman**

**John and Pete Akerman**

**Charity and Hugh**

**Efrem**

**Deputy Sheriff Davis**

**Lt. Col. Franklin Kolyer**  
and **Frieda Kolyer**

## **OAK RIDGE**

**Historical Figures**

**Maggie Lattimore (Aunt Maggie)**

**Station Matron**

**Brigadier General Leslie R. Groves**

**Director of the Manhattan Project**

**Ed Wescott**

**Official Government Photographer**  
for Oak Ridge

**Girlfriends**

**Penny Gallagher**

**Rose Stanton**

**Phyllis Acker**

**Charlotte**

**Daphne**

**Carol**

**Bonnie**

**Hattie Freeman**

**Oak Ridge Residents and Employees**

**Mrs. McCarthy, Momma**

**Betty Jones**

**Doris**

**Norman Weller**

**Lt. Scott Clark, Inspector**

**Mr. Martinelli and Mrs. Jane Martinelli**

**Joseph (Little Joey) Martinelli**

**Isabelle Martinelli**

**Male Friends**

**Holland Fielding**

**Jerry the MP**

**John Tarbell**

**Elijah Freeman**

**Govt. agents**

**Agent McCall plus unnamed**

# THE SILENT WOMEN

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. Like *Hidden Figures*, *The Silent Women* portrays women in more scientific aspects of volunteer work. Were you engaged in their lesser-known stories? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. There is a pattern of Song being left by men, either intentionally or otherwise, while women step up to fill these voids. Has this happened in your life? Why might this theme resonate with so many women? Does it cross cultural barriers?
3. Gardening and farming figures largely in *The Silent Women*. Why might the author have taken a deep dive into both? Did it have any added effect on your reading of this WWII history?
4. Most are aware that we interred the Japanese during WWII, but were you aware that other citizens, such as Italians, were also interred (though to a lesser degree)? Discuss your feelings about internment now that you know this history.
5. *The Silent Women* has a woman of white descent at its center. But Song is surrounded by many characters on the homefront who played an important role historically. Was there minority history in the novel that surprised you, or was there a character who stood out for you as being particularly intriguing?
6. Spies abounded in Oak Ridge during the war, for both sides. Discuss Song's role as a "creep." What would you have done in her situation? Also explore the many decisions she had to make along the way under threat of losing her job if she didn't comply.
7. The history of the Ghost Army was publicized only recently, due to classified reasons. But now, a major movie is in the works (it has not yet been released as of the writing of this question, with Ben Affleck set to direct and star in it). What do you think of this secret army's role in military history? Why might Hol's experience be different today than it was in the 1940s? Or would it be similar?
8. The making of the bomb—highlighted in the major release *Oppenheimer* (2023 Oscar winner Best Picture)—was controversial even amongst the scientists and the women and men who worked on building it. What is your take on the complex ethical issues surrounding its use in Japan? Were you able to feel the conflict in Song, or others like her, and understand it as best as you can? Considering the world today, is the story of the atom bomb more, or less, relevant?
9. In the last scene that Song shares with her mother, Pearl, she notices her mother blow a soap bubble while washing dishes. Song has a déjà vu moment. Did anyone in your book club catch that moment and recall where she experienced it earlier in the novel? And if so, what is the significance?
10. As a couple, what do you think makes Song and Hol work, and what is the significance of the final line? Discuss your interpretations.

# BEHIND THE BOOK INTERVIEW

..... with **TARA LYNN MASIH** by **MIDGE RAYMOND** .....

## **What was the inspiration for *The Silent Women*?**

I was doing research in Andover's historical society archives. Andover is a very old New England town, and there is a wealth of interesting historical stories in that area where I lived for 30 years. I'd decided to write about one particular topic, but one morning I got into a discussion with the director, who told me about June Carmichael, a parachute rigger in WWII who lived in Andover. Her story so intrigued me, I dropped the research I was doing and turned to researching June's volunteer work as a "silkworm." Eventually, I came across a book by Denise Kiernan, *The Atomic City Girls*, and in it found the story of Colleen Black, a leak tester in K-25. The vision of a young woman climbing over pipes—which held dangerous gases and were so gigantic she needed a ladder to get to the top—stuck in my mind. At that point, she took the lead in *The Silent Women*.

## ***The Silent Women* highlights the little-known history of women working at Oak Ridge, including African Americans, Native Americans, and LGBTQ residents. Why is it so important to include such characters in historical fiction?**

Thank you for asking that question. I'm fascinated by anything historical and every group that has contributed to the growth and prosperity of the country. I know many of the groups you mention get forgotten. Even I, who read a lot of history, was surprised by the amazing stories and contributions made to Oak Ridge on a smaller scale and, to the war in general, on a larger scale. Oak Ridge was built by the white population and the minority population working together for a greater cause. If we learn about the sacrifices our fellow Americans made to guarantee our freedom, and the struggles some made to overcome persecution, I think (hope) it makes us appreciate that freedom and our rights even more.

## **The history in *The Silent Women* spans the Dust Bowl to post-World War II, encompassing issues from the scientific to the political to the social. What was your research process like? Did you do most of the research before writing, or was it part of your entire writing process?**

Well, true story, I had to buy two standing bookshelves to hold the research and keep it organized! I think one reason there are so many WWII novels is that there is an overabundance of incredible stories and it was mostly recorded in some way. Through notes, books, photographs, blueprints, orders, diaries, etc., every single person in the US was involved in the war effort, even if it was simply picking potatoes for the army or knitting socks.

I began reading mostly nonfiction history books along with autobiographies and biographies and newspaper journals (see the Works Cited). I took reams of notes and flagged many pages, then organized it all by setting and subject matter on the shelves so I knew where it all existed when I needed to reference it. I drew maps, found photos of people who matched my vision of my characters as inspiration.

Then I started writing with a very crude outline. I don't outline as much as many authors I admire outline their first drafts. If I did, I'd probably turn out my novels faster than I do. But I love the way a story develops on its own to some degree, and how the characters sometimes determine their fate. That, to me, is the true magic in writing.

However, a nod to journalism: I often used newspaper articles to drive the plot forward historically and accurately.

# BEHIND THE BOOK INTERVIEW

..... with **TARA LYNN MASIH** by **MIDGE RAYMOND** .....

**How do the real women of Oak Ridge differ from your fictional characters?**

**And how are they similar?**

My fictional Oak Ridge characters very closely represent the real women who lived and worked there. I relied heavily on written and oral testimonies and interviews. While all are fictional, many are based on women who left us their stories, and sometimes I combined the stories into one character, such as Hattie. She is a nod to two women, one more well-known than the other. The first one has a spot in the Oak Ridge Museum and there is a video online about her. The second one will forever live in the shadows. She literally came from those shadows one night, asking a white woman who worked in the plant if she could borrow a book as there was no library for Black women. I had to honor the gumption and desire of both women, so Hattie became the conduit.

Song, as mentioned, is inspired by Colleen Black and many other leak testers who were willing to sit down with interviewers.

**The novel has a range of settings, from Oklahoma to Massachusetts to Tennessee to Florida.**

**How do each of these settings inform what happens in the story?**

Great question. There were times I regretted writing such an expansive novel with so many locations. I learned it makes it more of a challenge. I knew Song had to begin in Andover, as that is where I was living and I wanted her character to grow up there. Somewhere along the writing journey I had a dream of a large, whirling dust cloud, and I woke up realizing I had to connect the dust storm cloud to the atomic cloud. In doing research I landed on Black Sunday, and studied that disaster which hit Guyton, Oklahoma. It was apocalyptic. Not in the same way the Hiroshima bomb was, but there were parallels. So I bookended them, so to speak.

When I finished the novel, I was living full time in Florida, so once again, I pulled from local rural history as I wanted Song to deal with carrying her trauma after the war ended.

**While PTSD afflicts characters in *The Silent Women*, the theme of survival endures.**

**How did you find a balance for these characters who suffered through so much yet still found hope and love?**

It was hard, honestly. There was a danger, I knew, in making the book too dark. I'm known for dark stories. I much prefer to work with difficult themes as it stretches me and my own knowledge of life. But despite my dark leanings, I'm big on Hope with a capital H. Hope is a variation of Faith. We need one or the other to get through life. I also wanted to show how important female friendship is. It's gotten many of us through our darkest days. And love, of course, if we are lucky to find it, balances out the darkness. I tried to find balance and moments of joy and discovery. I hope it works.

**What do you hope your readers will take away from *The Silent Women*?**

I want people to take away the enormous grace we are all capable of during times of crisis. How we come together when we need to. At least, we used to. I think that's one reason why WWII stories have been so popular. We are in awe of that Great Generation who was willing to sacrifice what we today might not be willing to give up. I hope this book underscores to minorities, which include women, how much they have quietly and in this case "secretly" contributed to the positive side of history.

Finally, as in your question above, I want people, in the final scene, to connect to what might be coming for any of us in our lives, and what we need to do to survive. (I'm trying not to give away the end entirely as I know some people read the guides before the books!)

**Midge Raymond** is the author of the short story collection *Forgetting English* and the acclaimed novels *My Last Continent* and *Floreana*, which tells the reimaged story of an unsolved mystery that took place in the Galápagos Islands in the 1930s and was a *New York Times* Standout Release in historical fiction.

# THE SILENT WOMEN RECIPES

## ingredients

|                                                                              |                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1 cup light brown sugar,<br>firmly packed                                    | 1 tsp cinnamon                         |
| 1 cup water                                                                  | ½ tsp nutmeg                           |
| ⅓ cup shortening (can<br>sub. butter, veg. oil 1:1<br>ratio; applesauce 2:1) | ½ tsp salt                             |
| 1 cup raisins                                                                | 2 ¼ cup sifted flour                   |
|                                                                              | 1 tsp baking soda                      |
|                                                                              | 1 ¼ tsp double-acting<br>baking powder |

## Colleen Rowan Black's Eggless-Butterless- Milkless Cake\*

If you want to make something from the depression/time of war rationing, this “made the rounds in the Happy Valley Trailer Camp in 1944.” Colleen was the inspiration for Song. She suggests today’s chef topping it with icing or whipped cream to make it more flavorful.

\*From *Cooking Behind the Fence: Recipes and recollections from the Oak Ridge '43 Club*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Published by the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Assoc., 2015.

**C**ombine sugar, water, shortening, raisins, spices, and salt in medium saucepan. Bring to boil over medium heat, boil 3 mins., stirring constantly. Cool. Measure flour, add soda and baking powder. Sift again. Gradually stir dry ingredients into raisin mixture. Beat well. Pour in greased loaf pan. Bake at 325 for one hour.

## Aunt Bea's Gingerbread Boys

This is a hand-me-down recipe from my mother-in-law, Madalyn Gilligan, clearly a vintage recipe as well. Her gingerbread boys were a holiday favorite, as were Aunt Bea's. See the recipe above for notes on shortening and soda.

## ingredients

|                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 cup shortening                   | 1 ½ tsp soda                     |
| 1 cup sugar                        | 1 tbsp ginger                    |
| ½ tsp salt                         | 1 tsp cinnamon                   |
| 1 egg                              | 1 tsp ground cloves              |
| 1 cup molasses                     | Raisins and/or Red Hots          |
| 2 tbsp vinegar                     | cinnamon candy for<br>decoration |
| 5 cups sifted all-purpose<br>flour |                                  |

**T**horoughly cream shortening, sugar, and salt. Stir in egg, molasses, and vinegar; beat well. Sift together dry ingredients; stir into molasses mixture. Chill (about 3 hours). On lightly floured surface, roll to 1/8 inch thick. Cut with gingerbread boy cutter. Place 1 inch apart on greased cookie sheet. Use raisins or Red Hots for faces and buttons. Bake in moderate oven (375 degrees) about 6 minutes. Cool slightly; remove from sheet. Makes about 5 dozen.



# THE SILENT WOMEN

## RECIPES

**I**t came as a surprise to me that Florida has low-growing shrubs known as “dwarf huckleberries.” The flowers attract pollinators and the fruit is enjoyed by birds and mammals, such as bears. Bigfoot believers say it’s a favorite food of this mythical beast. Huckleberries are hard to produce commercially, likely why most people have not heard of them or eaten them, because they need to be handpicked. So they are more naturally found in nature but can be sourced from certain farm stands, grocery stores in the frozen section, and, of course, from the wild.

This might be similar to Eleanor Akerman’s recipe. Enjoy!

### ingredients

#### FOR THE PIE CRUST (DOUBLE CRUST):

2 ½ cups all-purpose flour  
1 tsp salt  
1 cup unsalted butter,  
cold and cubed  
6–8 tbsp ice water

#### FOR THE HUCKLEBERRY FILLING:

5 cups fresh or frozen  
huckleberries  
1 cup granulated sugar  
3 tbsp cornstarch  
1 tbsp lemon juice  
½ tsp ground cinnamon  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
1 tbsp butter, cut into small cubes

#### FOR ASSEMBLY:

1 egg yolk + 1 tbsp milk (for egg wash)  
Coarse sugar for sprinkling

*Note: Make it gluten-free, vegan,  
dairy-free, keto, nut-free or egg-free.*

**PREP TIME** 30 minutes

**COOK TIME** 1 hour

**ADDITIONAL TIME** 1 hour

**TOTAL TIME** 2 hours 30 minutes

- 1. MAKE THE PIE DOUGH:** In a large bowl, whisk together the flour and salt. Cut in the cold butter using a pastry cutter or your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add ice water gradually, one tablespoon at a time, stirring just until the dough comes together without being sticky. Divide the dough in half, shape into discs, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
- 2. PREPARE THE FILLING:** In a large bowl, gently combine the huckleberries with sugar, cornstarch, lemon juice, cinnamon, and vanilla extract. Stir until evenly coated and let the mixture sit for 15 minutes to allow the juices to release and the cornstarch to hydrate.
- 3. ROLL OUT AND ASSEMBLE:** Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). On a lightly floured surface, roll out one disc of chilled dough into a 12-inch circle and fit it into a 9-inch pie plate. Trim the edges to a ½-inch overhang. Pour the prepared huckleberry filling into the crust and dot with the butter cubes. Roll out the second disc of dough and cut into strips for a lattice top or use it whole, venting the center. Lay the lattice strips or full crust over the filling, trim and crimp the edges, then brush with egg wash and sprinkle with coarse sugar if using.
- 4. BAKE:** Place the assembled pie on a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake at 400°F (200°C) for 20 minutes. Lower the oven temperature to 350°F (175°C) and continue baking for 35–40 minutes more, until the crust is golden brown and the filling is bubbling visibly. If the edges brown too quickly, cover them with foil. Let the pie cool completely on a wire rack—at least 3 to 4 hours—before slicing to allow the filling to fully set.



*Emma's Notes: If using frozen huckleberries, do not thaw them before mixing to prevent excess moisture. The cinnamon is optional but enhances the berry flavor subtly. A full cool-down is essential for clean slices. © Emma's Cake Studio*

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Source: Calisphere

Date of access: August 9 2023 19:55

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