

Morsels for the Mind Book Group

Date: August 18, 2011

Book Title: The Madonnas of Leningrad

Hostess: Nancy Schellenberg

Food Served: smoked salmon, black bread, hummus, vegetable tray and dip, rhubarb spice cake with lemoncello gelato and berries. Coffee and tea were served in china cups, like they were in the book.

"Foods" mentioned in the book: pine bark, pine branches, broth from pine needles, Bubi, the cat, who was traded away, binding glue.

Book Synopsis: Marina was a curator at the Hermitage Museum during the 1941 Siege of Leningrad. She watched for German bombers and helped to wrap and store priceless art treasures from the museum's collection. She learns to memorize the missing paintings. Ironically, at the end of her life her short-term memory deteriorates due to Alzheimer's, yet she has flashes of long ago memories. She disappears into these memories as a retreat from the confusion of her current state of mind.

Review: Members enjoyed the book for the most part. They felt the author did a masterful job of giving a glimpse into the mind of a character with Alzheimer's. The period during which she lived was accurately depicted.

Highlights of Discussion: Most of us had little knowledge of the horrors of the Siege of Leningrad. We thought the portrayal of Marina was quite realistic. The themes of love, loss, and memory were prominent.

Attendance: Nancys Dausman, McQuate, and Schellenberg, Anne Starke, Julie and Ginny

Suggestions/Business: Our next meeting is September 15 at Laura's to discuss Claude and Camille.