

A+ - 24 October, 2011 - Mr. Rosenblum's List by Natasha Solomons

After reading a couple of depressing books, this book was so much fun.

Jack and Sadie Rosenblum move to England in 1937, to escape Berlin before it becomes too difficult for Jews to leave. Jack is obsessed with becoming a proper Englishman. He has a list of things a proper Englishman does and he tries to follow the list. He even adds many items to the list. He is so desperate to assimilate he ends up bumbling through his assimilation and finds himself in one crazy predicament after another. His wife Sadie, likes England and London but still misses Germany and her family, who did not survive the war.

By 1951 Jack is a very successful businessman having made a fortune in the carpet business. He decides that as a wealthy English businessman, he should play golf. Jack enthusiastically buys clubs and tries to join a club. Sadly, Jack being Jewish in 1950s England, he is rejected by every club. So Jack gets the idea to build his own golf course in Dorset. He neglects his business and goes heavily into debt to fulfill this dream.

There is no doubt that the fish out of water theme begins when Jack and Sadie move to their new property. Jack's enthusiasm for his golf course creates a number of crazy events and at times I did not know whether to laugh or cringe.

There are many ups and downs for Jack while building his course but he makes new friends and immerses himself in the local culture. When his plans are derailed by a competitor, his Dorset friends come to his rescue.

The main theme of this book is about identity. Jack wants to be English and not German and tries very hard to be a perfect Englishman. As hard as he tries, he still is excluded because he is German and Jewish. When he stops trying so hard, his English friends rally around him, not Jack the Englishman, but Jack their neighbor. He becomes a Dorset man by his honesty and diligence, not because he dresses or speaks a certain way. Sadie, who never wanted to fully assimilate, does so quietly and gains acceptance without losing her identity.

The best part of this book is all the crazy, somewhat impulsive, things Jack does to build his golf course. Naturally, you want Jack to succeed because he's gone to such extreme lengths to make his dream come true.

The appendix at the end of this book is an added bonus. The author explains her inspiration for the story and characters. She also took the time to thank some friends for their "remarkable knowledge of vintage German curses."