



Shadows Over Paradise

By Kathy Wibbels, Director Yankton Community Library

I have read many fiction and nonfiction books about aspects of World War II, but *Shadows Over Paradise* is the first one I've read that addresses acts committed by the Japanese against the people of the Pacific island of Java.

Jenni Clark, a ghostwriter, has lived in the shadows most of her life. Through her work, she immerses herself in other people's stories, puts those stories on paper, and watches her work be published without her name appearing on the book. She does not want to receive credit for her work and is content to complete one manuscript and move on to another.

Jenni's personal life is in turmoil as she is in a serious relationship with a man who wants to get married and start a family. Jenni, however, has never wanted children. She and Rick decide to separate and take time to think about their relationship when Jenni takes a job to write the memoirs of Klara, an elderly woman who lives in the Cornish coastal town of Polvarth. Jenni assumes Klara's story will be an easy project to complete while she contemplates her future.

However, Klara's story is far from ordinary and, as Jenni gets to know Klara, she discovers they have a

very similar circumstance in their lives that they share, the death of a brother. To compound Jenni's anxieties, she has returned to Polvarth, the place of her brother's death, to interview Klara.

Klara is Dutch and, as a child, grew up on the island of Java before and at the time of the Japanese occupation of the island during World War II. Klara's father was taken away by the Japanese soldiers. Several months later, Klara's mother, brother and her were removed from their home and imprisoned at several camps where they endured unimaginable suffering. While the story of this family is fiction, the existence of the camps and the number of deaths caused by the camps are not.

Wolff weaves both Jenni and Klara's stories together and produces a story of love, loss, and hope that reaches across generations. The reader watches two very different women at very different times in their lives work through grief and tragedies that have haunted them most of their lives.

Through this book, I learned about another facet of World War II and yet more inhumanities that never should have happened. I recommend this work of historical fiction to all who have an interest in World War II. Other works by Isabel Wolff that can be found at the library are *A Vintage Affair* and *The Very Picture of You*.



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