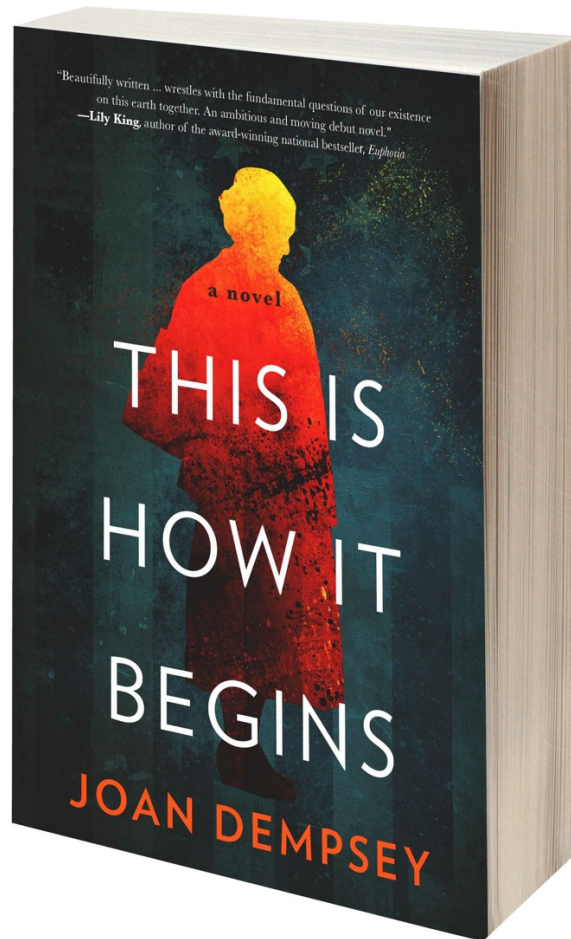


Press Kit

THIS IS HOW IT BEGINS

By Joan Dempsey



ISBN 978-1-63152-308-3, Trade paperback, \$16.95, Fiction/First Novel;
E-book ISBN 978-1-63152-309-0, \$9.95

Praise for
THIS IS HOW IT BEGINS
By Joan Dempsey

Winner, 2017 Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award
from *Poets & Writers*

"Beautifully written, *This Is How It Begins* wrestles with the fundamental questions of our existence on this earth together. An ambitious and moving debut novel." —**LILY KING**, author of the award-winning, national bestselling novel, *Euphoria*

"In a time when religious liberty is on trial, [this is] an extraordinarily pertinent novel dripping in suspense and powerful scenes of political discourse ... a must-read" —**FOREWORD REVIEWS (starred)**

"... Dempsey's fine first novel [is] notable for the evenhanded way it addresses hot-button issues. The result is a timely and memorable story." —**BOOKLIST**

"A gripping and sensitive portrait of ordinary people wrestling with ideological passions." —**KIRKUS REVIEWS**

"... spellbinding ... When a group is targeted for discrimination there will be resisters and rescuers, but mostly bystanders. ... Reading this moving adventure compels us to bear witness to the past and present and think about our own complacency to everyday discrimination in our midst." —**EVA FOGELMAN**, Ph.D., author of the Pulitzer Prize nominee *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust*.

"A remarkable novel full of characters on every side of the cultural divide, all imbued with genuine humanity ... a riveting, essential story for our time." —**MATTHEW GOODMAN**, *New York Times*-bestselling author of *Eighty Days: Nellie Bly and Elizabeth Bisland's History-Making Race Around the World*

"Thoughtful people who reach opposing conclusions are at the all-too-human center of this gripping novel, a prescient road map for our times." —**MARY RECHNER**, author of *Nine Simple Patterns for Complicated Women*

"... compelling story that seems to rise out of the rancor of current national headlines—about hate, bigotry, and intolerance." —**FRANK O. SMITH**, author of *Dream Singer*, a Bellwether Prize finalist

“Dempsey brings her characters to life with equal parts empathy and tough-mindedness, from the three generations of the Zeilonka family—refugees, artists, politicians, teachers—to the pastor and radio host striving together to remake the United States into a Christian nation. A riveting story of the clash between LGBT and fundamentalist Christian cultures, and the way its violence reawakens historical trauma, this striking debut is essential reading for our times.” —**JUDITH FRANK**, author of *All I Love and Know*

“Into these tumultuous and politically polarized times comes a beautifully wrought novel that plumbs the roots of bigotry, hatred and intolerance. *This Is How It Begins* makes it clear that we have been down this road before and we ignore the lessons of history at our own peril. A riveting, immensely satisfying read.” —**BILL LUNDGREN**, co-author of *Becoming (Other)wise: Enhancing Critical Reading Perspectives*

“This exquisitely drawn and timely novel will remind you why we have freedom of expression, ideas, sexuality and religion, and leave you wondering why we're so quick to forget the lessons of the past.” —**PADDY MURPHY**, *Material Pictures*

FROM THE AUTHOR

Joan Dempsey on the Writing of *This Is How It Begins*



How is it that 85-year old Ludka Zeilonka—art historian, professor emeritus, Catholic rescuer of Jews in Warsaw during WWII, Polish émigré who landed in America—came to be the protagonist of THIS IS HOW IT BEGINS?

She was a total nuisance.

Seriously.

I had set out to write a political novel starring a powerful Massachusetts state senator. I began writing, by hand, in a crisp new black and white composition book. I even wrote "The Senator's Story" on the cover. In ink.

But the poor senator didn't stand a chance.

His mother, the aforementioned Ludka, kept showing up, demanding to be let in.

I tried to ignore her—I had zero interest in writing about an elderly Polish woman. Plus, my senator wasn't Polish. His name was Douglas Gregory, for goodness' sake.

But no matter how hard I tried, Ludka kept insinuating herself onto the page.

And then something rather remarkable happened. It still gives me goosebumps to think of it.

One overcast day while out walking my two dogs, Logan and Beattie, I had a strong and sudden vision: 85-year old Ludka, crawling frantically across a smoke-filled room, a rolled up artist's canvas under her arm.

Suddenly, she had my full attention.

I wanted to know what was on that canvas. Why was it the one thing she was trying to save from what seemed to be a fire?

I opened up my composition book and began to write whatever came to mind about Ludka. I don't now remember how long it took before I found out what was on that canvas (it was years ago, after all), but at some point I discovered it was an oil portrait of Frédéric Chopin.

Now I know as much about Chopin as I do about elderly Polish women. So I set out to learn what I could, to see if I could find out what Ludka was doing with his portrait.

Of course I Googled it, and before long I discovered what I needed to know:

1. Chopin was Polish.
2. The earliest known portrait of him was painted by a famous Polish painter, Ambroży Mieroszewski.
3. The painting had gone missing from an apartment in Warsaw after the Nazis occupied the city—and it hasn't been seen since.

Ludka, as it turns out, seems to have "liberated" the painting from that Warsaw apartment when she was fifteen years old.

At that point, I utterly surrendered both myself and the novel to Ludka.

Doug Gregory became Lolek Zeilonka, and I ended up in Warsaw for a month on a research grant from the Elizabeth George Foundation, learning all about elderly Polish, Catholic women who rescued Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto.

I'm eternally grateful.

[You can see the portrait of Chopin here](http://thisishowitbeginsnovel.com/artwork/) (http://thisishowitbeginsnovel.com/artwork/).

As for why Ludka carried the painting through that smoke-filled room ... well, I'm afraid that's too much of a spoiler to share.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Winner of the 2017 Maureen Egen Award from *Poets & Writers*, New England native **Joan Dempsey** received an MFA and teaching certificate in creative writing from Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her writing has been published in *The Adirondack Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, *Obsidian: Literature of the African Diaspora*, and *Plenitude Magazine*, and aired on National Public Radio. Dempsey was the recipient of a significant research grant from the Elizabeth George Foundation for her work on *This Is How It Begins*. She lives in Maine with her partner and their family of animals.

Find her online:

- <http://thisishowitbeginsnovel.com/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Joan.Dempsey.Author/>
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Photo by Greta Rybus

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