

Letters from Brackham Wood: A Moira Edwards Mystery



By Rita Gard Seedorf and Margaret Albi Verhoef

Reviewed by D. Andrew McChesney

This is a compelling book written in an unusual way. Other than a brief introduction in which an individual is handed a container of letters to sort through, the bulk of the story is told via those letters. In pre-World War II England, Moira Edwards takes a chance to write to her cousin Margaret, now living in the Northwest United States. The letter reaches Margaret's parents living in Chicago and her mother forwards it on to her. Thus the cousins establish a correspondence which lasts nearly to the end of the war.

As they exchange letters, the cousins inform each other of the conditions each are living under, and at times compare cultural difference between England and the United States. "I just read that in America the Post Office delivers the mail while here in England the Royal Mail delivers the post."

As the story goes on, it seems that something isn't right with the couple that Moira works for as a "maid of all work," or "helper to the woman of the house." There are hints of espionage and other activities that may impact on the war effort. Meanwhile cousin Margaret Walker is one of Spokane, Washington's pioneering female physicians. As war looms, and as America is finally drawn into the conflict, she finds herself helping both refugee Jews and displaced Japanese Americans.

It is the ability of the cousins to confide in each other which moves the story forward. Only in the end does the narrator reappear to tidy up loose ends. The authentic feel of the letters was achieved in part by each of the authors writing as one of the two cousins. They in effect exchanged and answered letters just as the cousins did.

The story also serves to illustrate just how much things have changed since World War II. Prices and wages mentioned seem minuscule compared to today's standards. Communication was primitive in light of the internet, web, most often done by mail or post. The story also touches on civil rights, women's rights, and the changes in society over the years.

This was an interesting and intriguing read, one that was hard to put down, and one this reader anxiously awaited to pick up again. As a result this reader looks forward to the next book by these talent co-authors: *Letters from a Wary Watcher: A Moira Edwards Walker Mystery*.