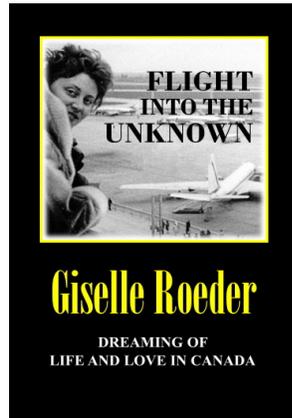
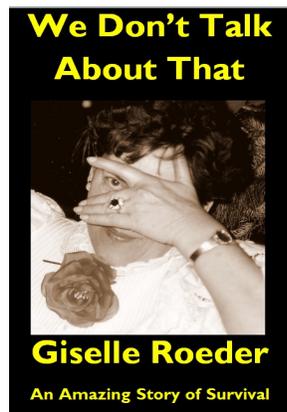


An Interview with Giselle Roeder



**June , 2021 Featured Guest
at**

Time with Tannia

(<http://timewithtannia.com>)

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés

1. You are a WWII survivor, a DDR escapee, an author, and a public speaker. How do the events of WWII and living in former Eastern Germany (DDR) shaped the women you are today?

Learning from the time I was three or four years old 'not to talk about what I hear at home...' I feel now that I never was a worry-free child. I was always on alert for any signs of 'danger,' to hide or to cry. My mom teased me relentlessly with 'crybaby, crybaby.' As an eleven-year-old, my Russian invasion experiences, watching horrible happenings and rape sharpened my sense of anticipation of what's coming next. Feeling and being responsible for my mother and three little sisters after the eviction from our family home with millions of others on the road to nowhere gave me the strength to do what had to be done. As a young teenager, I thought of ways to kill myself after my father came back from the hell of a Siberia prison; I felt useless, not needed anymore.

Not able to get decent schooling and no chance to apprentice anywhere, the comment of my Godmother that I couldn't even be a maid at a noble family set me off on a quest: "I'll show you, me - a maid! Ha! Never!" I had to fight for my education, but after years of struggle and being a top kayaker, I succeeded in attending university and graduated as a Physical

Education teacher. That drive, set off by my aunt, has never left me to make something of myself. Later, after I escaped from East Germany, considered a second-class citizen in the West, I needed to prove myself again as my education was not recognized. I had nobody to talk to openly, no family, no friends. Curled up in my bed, I spoke quietly to God, and often things happened that I cannot explain. I was often led to places or people who would help. All the hardships from early childhood under Nazi rule to experiences in a communist country and the abuse in the West shaped me into the woman I am today. Even now, I am always on alert, ready to run or get away from people who could attack me. And before you ask, no, I never had treatments for PTSD.

2. Many survivors of the Nazi Regimen and the DDR find it extremely difficult and painful to talk about it. However, you gathered your strength and courage and decided to share your memoir as a trilogy. The first book is *"We Don't Talk About That,"* it tells the story of your life in Germany. What was the hardest part of the process - apart from the decision to publication? Please share with our readers the journey.

There are not many of us left, born in the late 1920s or thirty's. The ones still alive have pushed their experiences to the back of their mind, and to this day, they don't talk about it. When I started asking questions of my two still living aunts in 2012, both reacted with horror. "Are you crazy? We don't talk about t h a t." That goes for the Nazi time; it goes for the Russian rapes every woman experienced and suppressed to open talk about their thinking or feelings living in the DDR. Many said, 'it's not so different from the Hitler time...'

I would never have had the courage to write the book if I wouldn't have been pushed to do it. I was like all my contemporaries and didn't talk about it. Then a Dutch lady and I were asked by our Probus Club to speak about our experiences during those years on Memorial Day. She was a baby but had a burn mark from a Nazi soldier's cigarette when her mother didn't give in to his demands - but she could only tell what her mother had told her. While I spoke, the room with 116 members present fell silent, and I could hear suppressed crying. When I finished, someone shouted, "Do you have a book? No? Then write one." Surrounded by many people hugging me, women crying openly, and men shaking my hand, I felt overwhelmed. I was afraid to write THAT book, but they kept pushing; my young son, who had never wanted to hear about my youth, told me to do it as by now his generation wanted to know. The final push came from my English partner, and, reluctantly, I started writing. During the 2 1/2 years it took me to finish the manuscript, I had many nightmares, reliving the past I had tried to forget. After publication in 2014, when I held the first printed copy in my hands, I broke down and cried for several hours.

3. When you tackle this sensitive topic with high school students, what are some of the misconceptions you hear more often from young people? What was your most memorable experience sharing your story with them?

It was a revelation. These young people from grade 11 and 12 had no clue what a war could be like; they were stunned, they were quiet, they listened and observed me showing photographs and pointing out on maps the teacher provided where it all happened and how the borders had changed after the war was over. In a shaky voice, one young male said, "We knew about Hitler, and the concentration camps and the 6 million Jews killed and history sound as if all Germans were Nazis. But nobody has ever told us how the ordinary German people had lived, survived or suffered. Thank you for coming..." A week later, the teacher sent

me a 31-question list her students had prepared and asked if I would consider coming back. This time, their biggest shock was to see my photographs of the Berlin Wall and asking the question: "How would you feel waking up one morning and there is a high wall all along your street, and you can't see your granny's house on the other side?" Stunned silence, big eyes and open mouths, the need to get answers, again with more photos and maps resulted in a plan to form a history group with my regular attendance and invitations from other high schools. But then, COVID19 happened.

4. The second book of the trilogy, "*Flight Into The Unknown*," tells the daring story of your marriage to an (unknown) Canadian penfriend with a small daughter, followed by your immigration to Canada.

Looking back at that daring moment when you decided to find a new horizon and are confronted with a new unknown, do you have any regrets? What type of story curves awaits your readers?

After "We Don't Talk About That" went around the world and was read in 90 countries that I know of through my WordPress website, I started to receive up to 200 e-mails a day asking, "And what happened then? What did you do..." And others saying, "...you left us hanging there, is there a sequel?" I had no choice but to write another book. I had not planned it - but my life was weird and exciting enough that I did. Again, I had nightmares when I came to writing about certain happenings in Canada. My immigration started more or less as a joke born out of boredom when I answered an ad I found in a magazine. "Father with a 4-year-old daughter in beautiful Vancouver, Canada looking for love and a new Mummy." I never expected an answer. This man's parents, living in Germany, smartly manipulated me into starting the pen-friendship.

After four months, I got 'engaged' by telephone, and they arranged my wedding without ever even asking me. Despite a good job, financial security but lonely, I enjoyed the attention of this well-to-do lawyer's family. I went along with everything, thinking, 'the apple does not fall far from the tree.' Hah! Did I ever get a surprise when joining him in Canada! He used my money to pay his debts, even the loan he had taken to come to Germany to marry me. I had no way of going back since all my earthly possessions were on a freighter on the high seas. I couldn't leave, even if I had the money because of the little girl. She was so happy to have a new Mummy. Curves for my readers? An unwelcome move across the country, another stepdaughter to take on and a baby on the way. My husband's bankruptcy, starting my own business, employing and training many women, becoming a media person, even having my own TV show for 9 1/2 years, getting requests for speaking at international conventions, many ups and downs. Finally, my husband's affair, followed by a nasty divorce when I agreed to leave him everything - I moved back to Vancouver, where my Canadian life had started in 1963.

5. You conclude the trilogy with the soon to be released, "*Set Sail for Life After 50*" – *Age is just a number*. Many said life begins at 50. Is this book the conclusion of a long journey that started tragically but ended with fulfillment and inner peace?

Yes, "*Set Sail...*" is the conclusion of the story of my life. But there were another thirty years to talk about. My x-husband had promised to make sure I'll end my life destitute, on the street or in the poor-house. I was determined to prove him wrong. I had to work to live, and I found

many ways to do that. Serious health problems and being told by my doctor I have two months to live, I went back to Germany, where I had my training as a Kneipp - Hydrotherapist. After an intensive 'Kur' as the Germans call it, I came home to Canada looking like a million. The customers of my little Skin Care Studio asked, "Can we go there too?" I sold my business and started a new one: "Health Travel - Lifestyle Consulting." I took over 200 Canadians to this Bavarian Health Resort over the next years, and many came with me every year.

I met several eligible men - but I was a burned child, and none seemed trustworthy enough to get involved. However, in the early years after 2000, I seriously started looking. I wanted a partner for dancing, cruises or other world travel and companionship. I answered ads, enlisted in a partner-agency, and finally, a friend told me about her experience with the internet. I was on Match.com for a year, had more fun and enough material to write a book about it - and when I wanted to cancel, there was the last photo of a man that kind of intrigued me. I remember saying to myself, 'where were you all my life...' I was now seventy years old, he two years younger. I twinkled him, and he wrote back through the Match page, "Are you the lady who wrote the book "Sauna, the Hottest Way to Good Health?" I wrote back, "How the h... would you know that?" He suggested e-mail contact, and, after meeting, we both cancelled our 'Match accounts.' The rest is history. To know what happened during the next 15 years, you'd have to read the book.

6. What is your source of strength that cultivates your spirit of endurance?

For one thing, I always had to provide for myself after I left the DDR in 1955. The 'I MUST' was still there, even in my darkest hour. I never relied on anyone. I remember two instances distinctly: Visiting the DDR with my three children in the early seventies, my old kayak friends invited us to go camping with them. They had a 'friendship regatta' and asked me to participate. I had not paddled or kayaked for 20 years, so I was reluctant. I finally gave in. The waves were relatively high, I was in a single boat, I fought the waves, and with each stroke, I said aloud, 'with God, with God .' I won that race. I could hardly believe it. Another instance when I was at the end of the proverbial rope and had absolutely nothing to eat for the next three days over the Christmas holidays 1955, a knock on my rented room door brought me face to face with a Lutheran sister, similar to a Catholic nun. She carried a basket with bread, butter, cheese, sausage and even chocolate. With a shiver down my back, I believed she was a Christmas angel. Without being a regular churchgoer, I was deeply spiritual and learned to trust in a higher being throughout my life. I remember tearing up when I saw a framed poem about 'Footsteps in the Sand.' I bought it for a dying friend with incurable cancer. He was an atheist but told me that that poem helped him to believe. After seeing only one set of footprints and asking God why - "Yes, my child, when there was only one set of footprints, that's when I carried you." So it was for me. Without this deep feeling that there will be help when I come to the end of my rope, and I did several times, I'll be saved. I was.

7. Once you decided to write your story, did you conceive it as a trilogy from the beginning or just happened after the book was well-received? Did you reach your goal?

Oh no, I didn't think of a trilogy, not at all! I didn't even want to write the sequel. But my many readers and even reviewers pushed me to do it. I had thought, *"We Don't Talk About that"* would be it. After another two years, *"Flight Into the Unknown"* was to be the sequel - and no more. But, I had too much material - and I just had to cut it off at the appropriate time, and

that was when I had come full circle and was back in Vancouver. I had to write a third book after what happened in my life after I was 50 years old.

8. How do you prepare mentally and emotionally for a talk?

Answer: I usually say, 'I am pregnant with hundred-thousand thoughts,' the topic going around and around in my head. I dream about it; I am thinking about it day and night. I make notes, but I can not speak from notes. I have to be 'free.' The notes are just crutches. My adrenals work overtime when the talk begins - and at the end, I am exhausted. I won't be able to sleep as I go over every detail, over everything I said and remember what I forgot. So for several days, I am sleepless before the talk and after.

9. Who is your favorite audience, and why?

I have no favourite audience. I love to talk about my books, am passionate, get people involved, to make them feel they are at my side, walking in my shoes. Many have expressed that, also after reading my books. I used to speak to Rotary or Probus Clubs, and Church groups who are adults, are often older people. But my experiences with the high school, the younger people, were opening another avenue in my thinking. I FEEL that this generation is unprepared for an eventual other war, God forbid, but they are spoiled, innocent and don't even think about a disaster.

10. Where can our readers buy your books and contact you?

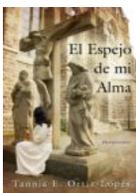
The easiest way during this crazy COVID time are the online shops, i.e. Amazon, which is everywhere, Kindle, Kobo, Barnes & Nobel; you name them. All they need is my name and the title of the book for which they look. For contact, there are my social media sites like Facebook, my website www.giselleroeder.com and naturally, my e-mail address, roedergiselle@gmail.com

11. What are some of the challenges you had to overcome during the current Pandemic?

That is the most challenging question, partly covered in my previous answer. Problems with lockdown, bookshops and libraries, I find it draining, depressing and disappointing not being able to have a book launch, book signings, book talks, interaction with my readers other than online. I have come close to saying 'what for...' and give up. But I am not a person to give up. I learned from my parents that you finish the job you have started.

12. A word of advice to survivors of tragic situations and those of us who have the honour to get to know you.

Believe in yourself, trust God within you and don't give up. When you come to the end of your rope, make a knot and - hang on!



Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *El Espejo de mi Alma* (BoD 2015) .

Author's website: timewithtannia.com **Stock photography website:**

<https://www.bigstockphoto.com/search/?contributor=Boricua63&safesearch=n>

Gift Shop: <http://www.zazzle.com/teolpuertorico>

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READER'S COMMENTS:

Date:	June 1, 2021
Name:	Genevieve Montcombroux
Comment:	Excellent interview, Giselle. I know about nightmares when writing this troubled past. I hope yours have come to rest and leave you in peace.
Date:	June 4, 2021
Name:	Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés (reply)
Comment:	Thanks for the kudos about the interview and your encouraging words for Giselle.