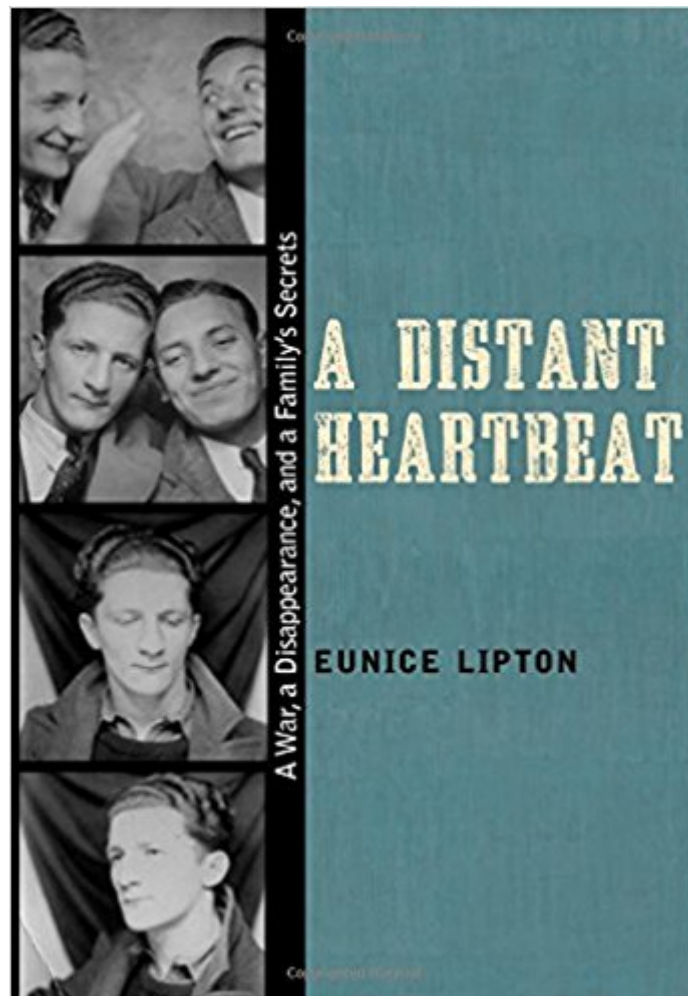




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# A Distant Heartbeat: A War, A Disappearance, And A Family's Secrets



## Synopsis

On May 20, 1938, a young man from the Bronx informs his parents that he is leaving for the Catskills to begin his new job as a waiter. Instead, he sails for Europe to join the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, the opening round in the fight against Hitler and Mussolini. The man, Dave Lipton—*the author's* uncle—sends letter after letter home detailing his hopes and begging for forgiveness. He never receives a reply. Decades later, Eunice Lipton stumbles upon clues for this silence, uncovering details of Dave's exhilarating political life in New York, his shuttered romantic life, and his deep friendship with another volunteer. *A Distant Heartbeat* tells a tale of passion and heroism, centered on a fierce competition between brothers, a packet of missing letters, and the unforeseen results of family betrayal.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“The very best stories are human ones, told with a compelling candor, offering insight into the human condition, and revealing what it truly means to live a life during 'interesting times.' Such is the case with *A Distant Heartbeat: A War, a Disappearance, and a Family's Secrets*. Midwest Book Review “A precise, elegiac journey through history, family tensions, and human drama. Shelf Awareness “A true pleasure. Jewish Currents “Anyone interested in the barbed landscape of families and the awkward, painful, jerry-rigged nature of family relationships will find *A Distant Heartbeat* a rich and weighty book. There are mysteries here, and a

deep, dark betrayal. But *A Distant Heartbeat* is less about surprises than about unwieldy sorrows and joys at the heart of what we call family life. *—An art historian’s account of the research she undertook to understand the life of a mysterious uncle. . . . Well-researched and . . . stirring.* *—Kirkus Reviews* “Eunice Lipton’s *A Distant Heartbeat* is an intriguing memoir about an uncle she never met, set within the much broader context of the international brigades who fought against Fascism in the Spanish Civil War. A well-told tale of idealism, diaspora, and both personal and political heartbreak, it draws the reader into the author’s lively (and dysfunctional) immigrant family until Uncle Dave’s fate resonates with us too.” *—Lucy R. Lippard, author of Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West* “Eunice Lipton goes beyond memoir to explore the subliminal legacies of a traumatic event, showing how history survives almost invisibly to affect future generations. Like a jeweler turning a stone, she reveals various facets of a family story that illuminates both past and present.” *—Peter N. Carroll, author of From Guernica to Human Rights: Essays on the Spanish Civil War* “A beautifully conceived quest-driven family memoir subtly intertwined with a cultural and political history of Jewish-immigrant New York City in the decades preceding World War II. Given its stylistic clarity, vivid approach, and its detective story qualities, readers will be unable to put it down.” *—Leo Spitzer, Vernon Professor of History Emeritus, Dartmouth College, author of Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* “The protagonist of *A Distant Heartbeat* is a man Eunice Lipton never met who died in a war being fought before she was born. Yet both the man and the war have haunted her throughout her life. Out of that dreamlike experience Lipton has fashioned an unusual and compelling memoir in which the actual and the imagined are vividly braided together.” *—Vivian Gornick, author of The Odd Woman and the City: A Memoir* “A heartfelt, eloquent book, and a most unusual addition to the literature on the Spanish Civil War.” *—Adam Hochschild, author of To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918*

Eunice Lipton is the author of *Alias Olympia: A Woman’s Search for Manet’s Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* and, more recently, *French Seduction: An American Encounter with France, Her Father, and the Holocaust*. She lives in New York and Paris.

"A Distant Heartbeat" combines biography, history, and memoir, but more profoundly, it is a meditation on the meaning of death and grief. Ms. Lipton began her research more than twenty years ago. She interviewed family members and survivors of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to recreate the life of her uncle Dave who slipped away from New York City in 1938 to fight the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War, only to fall to a sniper's bullet. In the Lipton family that death "never got to be over." In the intervening years she has obviously been ruminating on the meaning of Dave's life, history, Jewishness, and the importance of living on in memory. The result is not only a contribution to the history of the war in Spain, the political atmosphere of New York in the late 1930s, but also a philosophical insight into the importance of each life. Ms. Lipton states her purpose, "I'm hoping to breath life into a name that would normally be left a statistic." Her achievement restores the hope that each of our lives will not be forgotten.

Eighty years ago, the battle lines between right-wing authoritarianism and left-wing egalitarianism we know today were drawn in blood at the start of the Spanish Civil War. Dave Lipton, the author's uncle, was one of the 3,000-odd American volunteers who joined the fight in Spain. A beloved son and brother, his decision and a subsequent betrayal left a lasting scar on his family. In this book, the niece who never knew him unravels a cross-generational mystery that clouded family memories of her uncle's heroism and shadowed her own life. "A Distant Heartbeat" evokes the details of a Latvian Jewish immigrant family's life in New York with novelistic precision. We hear their voices, feel the complexity of their emotions and catch telling glimpses of their political, social and cultural milieux. The rigors and uncertainties of Dave's time in Spain are presented alongside the joys of intense camaraderie and commitment. The volatile dynamics of gender and sexuality are deftly rendered and sensitively probed. Lipton presents herself--as family member, author and sleuth--throughout the story. She is both judicious and forthright in her shifts from narrator to commentator. Ultimately, she has made "personal history" more than synonymous with "memoir." She has successfully merged disparate nonfiction viewing angles--the wide angle vision of history with the closeup view of personal testimony and reflection--to illuminate Dave's remarkable journey and her own. The result is thrilling. At a time when America and the world once again seem as roiled by political turmoil as they did in the 1930s, "A Distant Heartbeat" gives us new ways to think about relationships between our personal and our political investments.

This touching, fascinating and powerful book is an intricate combination of history and

psychoanalytic insight into the life of a family, in particular an uncle who volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Readers learn about a period when NYC was alive with activism for social justice issues, and gain insight into the hearts and minds of those who volunteered to fight. It's worth reading at least twice.

One of the most thoughtful and thought provoking books I have read in many years. I find it interesting that the Spanish Civil War was discussed again when the Syrian civil war started and the US was considering whether to sit on the side or get involved. My only complaint is that with the Kindle edition I didn't realize that there were endnotes until I finished the book.

A Distant Heartbeat fuses genres of writing seamlessly. It is part autobiography, part detective story, part family history, part chronicle of the Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, and part witness to the life-sustaining gatherings of aging brigadiers in reunions and anniversaries. Emotionally the book is a rollercoaster ride not only while reading it but also in remembering it.

I found the book to be fascinating, warm, touching, moving and I learned things that I never knew before. Brava, Eunice Lipton!

A very good read.....and extremely interesting

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