

Guest lecturer, author recalls flight from fascism, shares life lessons

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More than a survivor: Miriam Lipschutz Yevick, 88, shares journey of a buoyant spirit and ever-searching mind



Miriam Lipschutz Yevick reads from her book, "A Testament for Ariela."

As part of an eloquent introduction of guest lecturer Miriam Lipschutz Yevick, associate professor of [Foreign Languages and Literatures](#) Belén Atienza remarked that the speaker had “come to the right place when she came to speak at Clark, a place where there is a strong commitment to social justice.”

[Professor Atienza](#)'s pupils were among an audience comprising about 60 students, faculty and staff members who listened intently as Yevick, 88, recalled her experiences in a talk on Oct. 16 titled, “Flight from Fascism: From Nazi Europe to MIT.”

Before Yevick's talk, a group of Atienza's students each read a passage from Yevick's recently published memoir, “[A Testament for Ariela](#)” The book is a compilation of letters she began writing to her infant granddaughter, Ariela, in 1985, and continued writing through Ariela's wedding in 2006 and the birth of a great-granddaughter in 2008. It also includes a detailed account of Yevick's family's escape from the advancing armies of the Nazis in 1940.

“A Testament for Ariela” revolves around three central themes, Atienza noted: trusting in God, practicing loving kindness, and working toward social justice. The students presented readings from the book’s “Becomings” chapter, with such titles as The Day I Became a Socialist; The Day I Discovered Love; The Day I Discovered Euclid; The Day(s) I Became a Graduate; etc.



Several sophomore students read portions of Miriam Lipschutz Yevick’s book before her talk at Clark University. Joining her are (from left): Emily Bates, Hannah Yore, Emily Smela, Benjamin Ewald, and Rachel Kent.

Yevick spoke first of the abrupt end, at age 15, of her happy childhood when her family and many others made haste to escape the Nazi invasion of Holland and Belgium in 1940. Often reading passages from her book, she traced her family’s three-month trek through France and Spain, their arrival in the United States from Lisbon, and her years as an activist, author, and intellectual at the highest levels of academia. “In the middle of flight, she had her books with her,” Atienza pointed out. “Learning was the key to her survival.”

Once settled in the United States, Yevick went on to earn a bachelor’s degree from [New York University](#) in 1943 and a Ph.D. in mathematics from [MIT](#) in 1947, becoming only the fifth woman ever to earn this degree at MIT. As an associate professor of mathematics, she taught for 25 years at [Rutgers University](#), where she developed a special course titled “Mathematics, Life and Society,” for which she wrote an accompanying manuscript “Mathematics for the Billions.” In addition to “A Testament for Ariela,” Yevick has also published poetry and numerous scientific publications.

Students from four different courses heard Yevick’s talk, and several reflected on the experience.



Miriam Lipschutz Yevick joins a post-lecture luncheon with Belén Atienza, associate professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures, and Clark students.

“Reading Dr. Yevick’s book, it was amazing to see the insight of a much older and much more mature woman in a story experienced by a 15-year-old girl,” wrote Clark sophomore Benjamin Ewald in his reflection on the talk. “Having said that, the 15-year-old girl in the story, regardless of how much was added by the older Dr. Yevick writing the book, sounds much more mature and world aware than I was at 15. Reading this micro-history also gives us some insight in the cultural macro-history of Europe at the time.

“Meeting Dr. Yevick was wonderful,” Ewald continued. “Being able to put a face and a personality to the vivid stories was exactly what I needed to make the story come to life. Listening to the one who actually experienced these things recount her tale was truly special.”

Rachel Kent, also in Clark’s Class of 2015, wrote: “To have the actual author there to read sections of her book and talk about her experience really brought the words to life. While she was reading I could really sense the emotion she experienced and felt while living and writing this book. ... She is truly a brilliant mind, and having the opportunity to hear her speak about her triumphs was unforgettable.”

After her wide-ranging and candid talk, Yevick joined about ten students for a luncheon held in the department conference room. This time became extra special, Atienza noted. “They all talked about their plans,” Atienza said. “A beautiful moment of that second talk happened as [Yevick] addressed the students very passionately, telling them ‘You women, who will be future teachers or leaders in not-for-profit organizations, you will have an enormous amount of power the moment you graduate. In ten years you will be the people who will change the world.’ ”

Added Atienza: “The students were almost in tears, they were so moved to be told that it was their turn. [Yevick] had a strong sense of mission. The lessons she learned were not wasted, especially for women.”

Luncheon visitor Barbara Goldoftas, assistant professor in the [International Development, Community and Environment](#) Department, told the students about her own father’s flight from Belgium, made at that same time as that of Yevick’s family.

Goldoftas' father kept a journal during that time and his story revealed haunting parallels to Lipschutz Yevick's tale.

"Most of Barbara's family died," Atienza noted with sadness. "That was an emotional moment for the students. The intimacy of the lunchtime meeting was such that people felt safe to talk about emotions -- not only about what happened in the past, but how this might shape their lives in the future."

Atienza recognized and thanked the event's co-sponsors, the Clark University [Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures](#), the [Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies](#), the [Higgins School of Humanities](#) and the [Dean of the College](#).

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