



*Grandfather's*  
**Mandolin**

FRAN MARKOVER

## PRAISE

Sometimes a soul will come along and feel the sacred in the ordinary, and if they write poetry, the poetry, like this does, carries the recognizable weight and texture of truth.

DAVID KEPLINGER  
HENRY MORGENTHAU POETRY PRIZE JUDGE, 2020

Fran Markover offers us a loving and honest reflection on the lives of her mishpoche (family) and her ancestors and how they live on in her – the foods they made, the musical instruments they played, the sacred rituals they observed, the Yiddish expressions they used, their pain and their joy. As she writes about her great aunt, “If things aren’t as you wish, wish them as they are, she’d mutter in a language I couldn’t quite understand.”

RABBI BRIAN WALT  
TIKKUN V’OR

Fran Markover’s poems feel spilled from a pre-written scroll of memories so lush with love of language that the people in them seem to convey what it means to be touched by the divine. Her poems speak of a Jewish past that teaches how to envision and capture a durable beauty for the precarious present.

BARBARA REGENSPAN  
EMERITA PROFESSOR, COLGATE UNIVERSITY

Lipstick and ribbons, flight and survival, aroma and dust – with skillful open-hearted lyrics, Fran Markover creates a book of grieving for, and rejoicing in, forebears and family. “Let her/pluck cherries, jewel the strudel” – in their acts of care and nourishment, of praising and praying, of farming and fleeing, the people of *Grandfather’s Mandolin* might be brave, tender, saucy, forgetful, as they handle the apple harvest, wander the cemetery, candle an egg, glimpse an aunt’s fulsome breast, smile with a cup of tea, strum and pass along a treasured mandolin. These poems braid languages and generations; they sing their scenes and stories with ingenious formats, gleaming images, and full-throated delight.

MARY GILLILAND

AUTHOR OF *THE RUINED WALLED CASTLE GARDEN*

In this debut collection, Fran Markover honors family who fled the pogroms in Eastern Europe to build their lives in New York. A mandolin that made the journey here – a granddaughter who translates the music of family into poems. These are necessary, buoyant poems, filled with tenderness and awe.

MELISSA TUCKEY

EDITOR, FORMER POET LAUREATE OF TOMPKINS COUNTY, NEW YORK

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New Book of Poems Focuses on Family and Ancestry**

Passager announces the publication of *Grandfather's Mandolin* by Ithaca, NY writer Fran Markover. The book is a collection of poems deeply rooted in family and family history.

*Grandfather's Mandolin* was selected by judge David Keplinger as runner up in Passager's 2020 Morgenthau Poetry Prize contest for a writer 70 or older. Keplinger said that "in these poems languages and names and articles of clothing seem to have lives, hats are thought to be alive, and names deserve elegies and memorials because they are breathing things that can pass away from this world, if we do not take care. Poem by poem, Markover creates a rich landscape of lives remembered, honored and loved."

Markover grew up a farmer's daughter in New York's Shawangunk Mountains and has worked for many years as a psychotherapist and addictions counselor. She has won poetry residencies from the Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts. Her chapbook *History's Trail* was published by Finishing Line Press.

Passager editor Kendra Kopelke said, "When we first read the manuscript, we felt held, truly held, by Markover's words. She has made a home in these poems for her family and her ancestry, their love and their sorrow – and by extension, ours, too." With

*Grandfather's Mandolin*, Passager continues its tradition of bringing the compelling writing and insight of older writers to the public.

In its 30 years of publishing 71 journal issues and 30 books, Passager has shared the work of more than 1,000 writers, many in their 80s, 90s and 100s. In doing so, this not-for-profit press has gained a reputation for longevity in a field in which few magazines and journals last more than a handful of years.

*Grandfather's Mandolin* is available from [www.passagerbooks.com](http://www.passagerbooks.com).

# DEAR GRANDMOTHER ZIPPORAH

from *Grandfather's Mandolin*

I want to sail back to 1917, visit the motherland  
where you learned: bring extra sweaters, chocolate,  
crackers, just in case. Sail back to 1920, enter the

rowboat that carried you and young Moishe, grand-  
father-to-be. To witness another vessel, miles up-  
stream, the neighbors who didn't make it. To return,

toss stones of remembrance into the river, recite  
Kaddish for names drowned. I want to be caged in the  
Bucharest jail and fathom the fright of bribing

a soldier, to escape then haggle over a lace dress,  
wedding ring that'll someday grace a daughter's finger.  
I'd like to rescue Grandfather's mandolin so that I could

hear him strum Yiddish folk tunes, the instrument re-  
strung so that his grandson could wail rock songs for  
a high school band. I'd like to re-stamp immigration

papers that stated your name as Pauline, not Zipporah.  
Time-travel to first sightings of the Mother of Exiles  
lifting her torch, lighting *your tired, your poor*, as you

struggled with a new language, stepped onto the dock,  
dirty and pregnant with my favorite uncle. To hold sweat-  
pearled hands as we walk, freeing long deep breaths.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photograph by Joe Ziolkowski

Fran Markover grew up as a farmer's daughter in the Shawangunk Mountains. She is a psychotherapist and addictions counselor. She has won poetry residencies from the Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts and her chapbook *History's Trail* was published by Finishing Line Press. *Grandfather's Mandolin* was runner up in Passager's 2020 Morgenthau Poetry Prize contest for a writer 70 or older. Fran lives in Ithaca, New York, with her rescue cats and her husband Ron, who often does the housework so she can have time to write.

## ORDERING INFORMATION

*Grandfather's Mandolin* by Fran Markover

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