

## LOVE EVERY LEAF

The Life of Landscape Architect Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

By Kathy Stinson, Tundra, 96 pages, \$28.99, ages 11 and up

Author Stinson posits in this biography of Canada's "grande dame" of landscape architecture that fuelling Cornelia Hahn Oberlander's creative genius is her perhaps unconscious desire to re-create the Eden from which she was expelled.

Oberlander was born into a German Jewish family in 1921 and spent an idyllic early childhood in a large house with gardens of lilacs and copper beech in Berlin. By the age of 11, inspired in no small part by her mother, a horticulturalist, she knew that she wanted to "make parks" when she grew up.

With the Nazis' rise to power, though, life for the Hahn family became increasingly constricted; in 1939, through Cornelia's father's connections, the family bypassed the emigration lottery and sailed for the United States, escaping a fate that overtook too many others.

Degrees in landscape architecture from Smith College - where she discovered the work of Frederick Law Olmsted - and Harvard University gave her both theory and practice in her field, and a subsequent marriage and move to Canada launched a Canadian life and career.

In her opening chapter, Stinson quotes Oberlander as saying that "no one who has ever written about me has ever quite got me. Perhaps you'll be the one." It is questionable whether Stinson has quite "got" all of this remarkable woman: There is evidence from Stinson that at some level Oberlander didn't want to be "got." But she did want an account of her ideas about landscape design and the projects that she conceived and executed, and this Stinson has done for her.

Oberlander's finest achievements in a brilliant career that spans more than 60 years include the children's creative playground at Expo 67, one of the first of its kind and a much emulated one, and the landscaping of UBC's Museum of Anthropology. Stinson quotes the museum's architect, Arthur Erickson: "One of the most remarkable things about Cornelia is her ability to find a solution to difficult challenges through research. ... If I can use her on a project, I do."

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