



## **USEFUL GIFTS**

**Stories by Carole L. Glickfeld**

**Winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award  
for Short Fiction**

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5.5 x 8.5 | 224 pp.

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### **Praise for the book**

“A wonderfully evocative debut collection ... An understated, pitch-perfect prose style and a view of childhood ... as dark and comic as it is moving.”—*Voice Literary Supplement*

“The world of Ruthie Zimmer, youngest child of Jewish deaf parents, is captured with aching authenticity. ... The stories are redolent of a New York neighborhood that once was.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*

“When Ruthie Zimmer translates ... the world of the deaf is not at all silent; it’s bursting with life and conversation.”—*New York Times Book Review*

“Glickfeld displays a gift for characterization, particularly when describing the abusive, miserly father whom Ruthie can neither love nor abandon. Stylish nostalgia is tempered with humor and hard-boiled realism.”—*Library Journal*

“Ruthie is the kind of direct yet reflective girl who might have emerged from the pages of J.D. Salinger.”—*Boston Woman*

“Wonderful sad, funny stories about New York street life and growing up in a handicapped family.”—*Bloomsbury Review*

“Deft and darkly funny.”—*7 Days*

### **About the book**

Charged with the mystery of childhood, with curiosity and daring, confusion and fear, the eleven interrelated stories in *Useful Gifts* explore what Ruthie knows. The youngest child of profoundly deaf parents living in Manhattan in the 1940s and 1950s, Ruthie Zimmer speaks and signs. Interpreting for her parents, she tries to make sense of worlds as close as her family’s fourth-floor apartment, as expansive as her rooftop playground and as diverse as the neighborhood below.

The ways of language, its ways, its habits, its humor—as well as the demons that rise within us when we fail to communicate—form an undercurrent in many of Carole Glickfeld’s stories. In “What My Mother Knows” Hannah Zimmer gleans the neighborhood gossip from her apartment window, telling Ruthie in a gesture that Mrs. Frangione is pregnant again, and announcing in clipped, terse signs that the O’Briens have divorced. “Know drunk? ... Unhappy, fight, wife, divorce.” There is, in “My Father’s Darling” the hoarse, choked screaming of Albert Zimmer, “Honorfatherhonorfatherhonorfather” striking his daughter Melva as she sinks to the floor muttering “Misermisermisermiser” in the distant, disembodied voice of a ventriloquist. And, in “Talking Mama-Losh’n” there is Sidney, Ruthie’s older brother, “getting down to business,” sprinkling his speech with Yiddish, French and German—words that project a wisdom and cosmopolitanism he clearly craves.

Three floors below the Zimmer apartment, Ruthie enters the altogether different realm of Dot, a thrice-married hatcheck girl, and her daughter and son, Glory and Roy Rogers. These are characters who, as their names seem to promise, bring adventure and excitement—from acted-out fantasies of Hollywood to gunfights amid the rooftop battlements of “Fort Arden,” from impulsive, stylish haircuts to Chinese food with pork. And, across the stoop, Ruthie visits with the Opals family—Iris, Ivy, and Ione—three daughters whose endless lessons in charm, elocution and posture prime them for future “fame and glory.”

In *Useful Gifts*, Carole Glickfeld creates, through the optimistic voice of a young girl, intimacy with the complexity and heartbreak of a world we hope she can survive. In the closing story of the collection, Ruth Zimmer, twenty years older, retraces her neighborhood—not only to preserve her memories but to understand, finally, their effect on her now, a grown woman living three thousand miles away.



**Carole L. Glickfeld**, a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA), has won numerous awards for her fiction, including the Washington State Book Award for her novel *Swimming Toward the Ocean* and a National Endowment for the Arts Literary Fellowship. Her stories and essays have appeared in literary anthologies and journals including *William and Mary Review*, *Worcester Review*, and *Crosscurrents*. She lives and teaches in Seattle. (photo credit: Susan Rothschild)