

"An impressive debut."

Rabindranath Maharaj  
*The Amazing Absorbing Boy*  
Winner 2011 Trillium & Toronto Book Awards



## Ruth E. Walker

Ruth E. Walker's very first fiction submission won *Canadian Living* magazine's 1996 short story contest.

Published in Canada, the U.K. and the U.S., Ruth has won prizes for her fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. A popular workshop facilitator, she has led many writing workshops/retreats. Ruth co-founded the literary journal, *LICHEN Arts & Letters Preview* and is an active volunteer in the creative arts community in Durham Region.

Married and the mother of four, Ruth lives and writes in Whitby, Ontario.

[www.rutewalker.ca](http://www.rutewalker.ca)

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[info@seraphimeditions.com](mailto:info@seraphimeditions.com)  
[www.seraphimeditions.com](http://www.seraphimeditions.com)

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# LIVING UNDERGROUND

A NOVEL BY  
RUTH E. WALKER

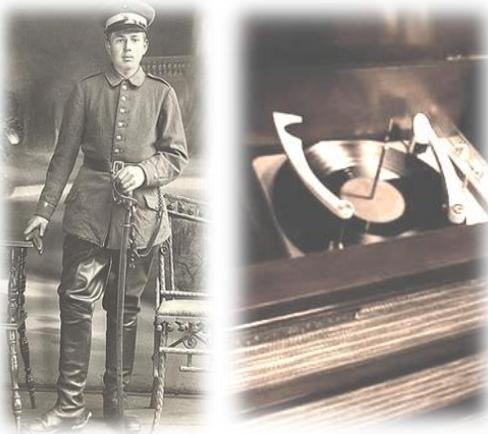
## A Reader's Guide

Two parallel beginnings,  
worlds apart.

Two eras of profound change.

One story of secrets, yearning and  
letting go.

**LIVING UNDERGROUND:**  
A debut novel by  
Ruth E. Walker



## Does 'The Past' Haunt Us and Frame our 'Today'?

### 1960s Scarborough, Ontario

14-year-old Sheila Barnes dreams of independence and longs to move into the family's basement apartment.

Heading into high school, Sheila believes that the apartment will make up for all the things she knows she doesn't have: confidence, beauty and her mother's love.

Her dreams end when Sigmund Maier moves in. She resents the intrusion of the strange and enigmatic German immigrant until her introduces her to the world of music, art and culture.

Sigmund changes Sheila in ways that she could never imagine then breaks her trust and heart by vanishing.

### 1914 to 1945 Dresden, Germany

Sigmund Maier longs for his father's family to rescue him and his mother from his miserable grandfather. The time he spends at the Semper Opera House where his mother works as a seamstress allows him to hope.

Young Sigmund is certain that music will be his life until tragedy closes that door. He discovers a new calling working with his hands and, eventually, is caught up in a moral darkness beyond his imagining.

## Two childhoods. Two choices. One inevitable outcome.

Sigmund reappears in Sheila's successful adult life. He needs her help in sorting out a "simple misunderstanding" with Canadian immigration officials. But the simple misunderstanding becomes a much darker investigation into his past.

### Spring 2000 Toronto, Ontario

Two points of view take us on a narrative journey through childhood, allowing a glimpse into what shaped these adults who must now make difficult and life-altering choices.

Will Sigmund finally express regret for the pain he caused Sheila? And can Sheila ever forgive him?.

***"Frankly, there isn't anyone you couldn't learn to love once you've heard their story."***

*A quote that children's TV host, Mr. Rogers, always carried in his pocket.*



SEMPEROPER  
DRESDEN GERMANY

## Questions and ideas for discussion

- Is it possible for two people separated by age and culture to still form a bond that lasts decades?
- History is told through the perspective of the victor. Did you learn anything new about life in Germany before, during or after WWII?
- Today's teenagers are much more savvy than Sheila was in 1967. Would she have been as curious about the tenant in the basement apartment if her story had started in 2007?
- Did any part 'kick you out' of the story? What part was most compelling to you?
- Is it possible to forgive someone no matter what they have done?

**At what point did you forget you were reading?**

**Could you make the same choices as Sheila?**