



## The Beauty Shop

*Suzy Henderson*

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England, 1942. After three years of WWII, Britain is showing the scars. But in this darkest of days, three lives intertwine, changing their destinies and those of many more.

Dr Archibald McIndoe, a New Zealand plastic surgeon with unorthodox methods, is on a mission to treat and rehabilitate badly burned airmen – their bodies and souls. With the camaraderie and support of the Guinea Pig Club, his boys battle to overcome disfigurement, pain, and prejudice to learn to live again.

John 'Mac' Mackenzie of the US Air Force is aware of the odds. He has one chance in five of surviving the war. Flying bombing missions through hell and back, he's fighting more than the Luftwaffe. Fear and doubt stalk him on the ground and in the air, and he's torn between his duty and his conscience.

Shy, decent and sensible Stella Charlton's future seems certain until war breaks out. As a new recruit to the WAAF, she meets an American pilot on New Year's Eve. After just one dance, she falls head over heels for the handsome airman. But when he survives a crash, she realises her own battle has only just begun.

Based on a true story, "The Beauty Shop" is a moving tale of love, compassion, and determination against a backdrop of wartime tragedy.

## **The Beauty Shop Details**

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## From Reader Review The Beauty Shop for online ebook

### Mary Clark says

This is a love story set in a charming English town and its environs during World War II. Stella Charlton, a young woman working on the ground to aid the local Royal Air Force base, and John "Mac" Mackenzie, a young American pilot from a nearby Eighth Air Force base, fall in love at a dance. Stella is in a relationship with an RAF pilot, who is distant and troubled. Mac is stressed and depressed by the dangerous missions he is flying. Their courtship is complicated, but becomes even more so when Mac is badly burned after a crash landing. He is sent to a hospital unit run by an extraordinary doctor, Archibald McIndoe. He "fixes them up," but does much more by working with the community at large to change the way the now disabled and scarred men are perceived and treated once they leave the hospital. It is his vision that they will be able to live as normal lives as they can, and not be consigned to begging on the streets as happened to many disabled World War I vets.

The scenes of life on the base and in the small English towns, including the weather, flow naturally. The reader is treated to the sights, scents and sounds of the English countryside, the hospital, and the B-17 bomber. Most impressive are the descriptions of Mac and his crew, and their experiences during air combat. They remind me of my own father's memories of his experiences as a gunner and radio operator on a B-24 based in Norfolk, England. Many did not return, and those who did, were haunted by the horror they saw. Mac is also reminded of the horror he is responsible for, when he sees the results of a German bombing of an English town.

The book shows how important the strength of love is in times of war. I found The Beauty Shop an enjoyable read, even though there were times when it dragged a bit due to some unnecessary plot contrivances. One of things I enjoy is learning something new, and this book delivered that with its story of Dr. McIndoe's efforts. I am giving The Beauty Shop 5 stars for the author's believable characters, her extensive research of World War II, and her connection with this information, which she has shared so well with her readers.

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### Karen says

This was a terrific debut novel by **Suzy Henderson** who is a first time author for me. My only complaint was it was a bit too long with a lot of information, especially at the beginning. It definitely describes a deeper and darker side regarding the ravages of war. Its a side we don't usually hear about. I will definitely read more from this author.

If you enjoy Historical Romance with some gritty war related details I certainly recommend it!!!

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### Mary Yarde says

Sometimes ordinary people do the most extraordinary things. Based on a true story, The Beauty Shop is an evocative tale full of bravery, suffering and hope.

"Over sexed, over paid, and over here." John 'Mac' Mackenzie of the US Air Force is here to do a job. A

pilot of the formidable B-17, it is his responsibility to bring his crew safely home. Mac was very real in the telling. He understands the important role he has to play, but he struggles with the reality of what each mission means — not only for himself and his crew, but for those poor innocent civilians that just so happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when his Flying Fortress drops those bombs. Ms Henderson creates a vivid account of what life must have been like for those brave men who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to bring about an end to the war.

Stella didn't ask for this war, but she is determined to help in any way she can. She joins the WAAF, determined to do her bit. Her mother wants to see her settled down and Alex seems to tick all the right boxes. But then at a dance, her eyes meet those of a young American pilot and life as she knows it will never be the same again.

Dr Archibald McIndoe, a New Zealand plastic surgeon, has dedicated his life to helping those who have been horrifically injured while fighting for freedom. He is determined to make a difference. Archie isn't just a Dr he becomes a friend to his patients — he is a beacon of hope when it seems all light has been extinguished. He is the unsung hero of a tragedy.

The Beauty Shop really got under my skin. The realism was so vivid it felt like I was sat next to Mac while he flew into Hell. I felt every jerk, every shudder that the B-17 made. I could feel the fear in the hearts of the men and the desperate relief they felt when they crossed back over the Channel and made a safe touch-down on the runway.

I adored the characterisation of Mac. He is full of integrity and decency. He is the kind of man you would want your daughter to bring home!! Through him, Ms Henderson shows the horror of war and the comradeship that such a thing brings.

Stella has the most beautiful soul. She wants to do what is right by everyone, and is desperate to make her mother happy, but when she meets Mac everything changes. She doesn't want to fall in love with him, but some things cannot be denied. She is steadfast in her loyalty to him, and when things take a turn for the worse and Mac finds himself in the hospital, Stella is determined to be there for him, despite what he might have to say on the subject! Love, it seems, really does conquer all.

I was truly humbled when I read about Archibald McIndoe, who is based on a real person. McIndoe did so much for those brave young servicemen who had walked through Hell and had the scars to prove it. If only there were more men like him then maybe the world would be in a different place than it is today. A sobering thought.

The Beauty Shop is one of the most emotionally captivating stories I have read in a long while and one that will stay with me for a long time. I adored the characters, the setting, and the story. This one is a keeper. If I could give it more stars, then I would! I Highly Recommend.

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**Roy Murry says**

The BEAUTY SHOP

SUZY HENDERSON

Reviewed by Roy Murry, Author

As a Vietnam Veteran who has seen cohorts die from injuries, this novel rang true with the atrocities of war. This story is about the cruelty of burn patients in World War II and how one man helps changed their lives for the better.

B17s or flying fortress was the backbone of the Allied bombing effort against Germany. The men that flew in them and other planes had accidents that caused life-threatening burns.

The BEAUTY SHOP is the story of a burn victim, a lieutenant and his lady. How they met; how he ended up scared with burns; and how they each met the doctor of the beauty shop.

It is a love story intertwined with the horrors of war. This story is full of surprises and human reactions to the realities of war particularly that of how we treat our wounded veterans physically and psychologically.

At the time, they did not understand PTSD, as they do know. It plays a part when the lieutenant, after a burning episode returns to duty. The strength of his love becomes a significant factor in the ending of this well put together Chronicle of a man who cared for and operated on burned warriors.

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### **Hunter Jones says**

I read very quickly, I can read a novel in a day. However, halfway into the first chapter of The Beauty Shop and I knew this was a book that had to be savored. Although it is historical fiction, author Suzy Henderson did extensive research on the actual story of Sir Archibald McIndoe and the Guinea Pig Club.

The Beauty Shop is the fictional story of US Air Force Lieutenant John 'Mac' Mackenzie, pilot of the B-17 Flying Fortress Texas Rose and WAAF Stella Charlton who fall in love at Bassingbourn England, and the book is based on their story. But, this is much more than a love story. The cast of characters play out the horrors of WWII. The depth of emotion that the author placed into each character's perspective was intriguing and I found myself captivated by her talent and ability to weave a story, often finding myself in tears due to the heart break, loss and madness of wartime. Yet, love overcomes all and at the end the silk of a parachute which saved one life joins two lives. Time is a healer. This book is a must read.

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### **Jennifer Young says**

Suzy Henderson's debut novel blends fact and fiction as it crosses the boundaries between historical fiction and romance — bringing the best of both. Set during the Second World War, The Beauty Shop tells the story of New Zealand plastic surgeon Archie McIndoe as he struggles to repair the faces and save the soul of badly-burned airmen — because, as the heroine, Stella, observes: "What good is a face if the man is not

whole”? And woven within it is the love story of US airman Mac, and Stella, the English girl with whom he falls in love.

When Mac is badly burned trying to save a life, he’s taken under Archie’s care and the love story develops alongside the tale of healing inspired by a man ahead of his time. While the romance is strong, it’s the horror, the hope and the heroism of war that dominate. Stella and Mac fall ever more deeply in love but around them, others are struggling, too. One disfigured airman is determined to marry his understanding sweetheart; another is abandoned by the wife who can’t take his injuries. Pilots and civilians alike are subjected to violence and death, and the descriptions of the bombing raids are particularly vivid.

In turns gut-wrenching, heartbreakng and moving, *The Beauty Shop* is wonderfully readable and elegantly written — and, ultimately, uplifting. A fabulous debut.

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### **Anne Harvey says**

Set in the middle of WWII, when the surgeon Archie McIndoe is performing plastic surgery miracles on badly burned pilots, this book is a mixture of fact and fiction. McIndoe himself has a dominant point of view and the reader really begins to understand his total dedication to his patients, to the cost of his own health. Underpinning the story are Stella, a young WAAF and Mac, an American Pilot with the 8th Army who fall in love but are kept apart initially by Stella’s loyalty to boyfriend Alex and Mac’s pride when he too is badly burned. The medical research seems to be excellent and the love story is pleasant enough, though I wanted to shake some sense into Stella at times. However, the author’s horticultural research is a little lacking. One does not have roses flowering at the same time as cherry blossom neither do hydrangea bloom in the spring. I’m a gardener and this niggled me. On the whole, I thought it a good read and one I would recommend.

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### **Lisa Marie Gabriel says**

I found the author of *The Beauty Shop* on Twitter and I confess I was intrigued by her book so I added it to my “to be read” list and there it just sat for a while. When I opened it up for the first time on my Kindle, I was hooked from the first chapter onwards.

*The Beauty Shop* draws on the story of Archie McIndoe and “The Guinea Pig Club” for its setting and within that context we are presented with the romance between Stella, a WAF, and Mac, an American pilot. I really cared about the characters in this book and was anxious for Mac and his comrades as they flew dangerous missions over Germany in their B17s. These scenes are superbly written and a sense of extreme danger comes across at all times. Similarly, Suzy Henderson doesn’t draw back when she describes the dreadful injuries the pilots suffer and the early plastic surgery procedures they had to endure.

*The Beauty Shop* is a book I can highly recommend as engaging, historically accurate and extremely well-written. If you have any interest in the 1940s, World War Two, medical history or flying this will be the book for you. A thoroughly well-deserved 5\* rating for a book that does justice to the heroism of this generation and the terrible things they had to endure.

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## **Dianne Ascroft says**

This novel vividly and sensitively evokes the world of pioneer plastic surgeon Dr Archibald McIndoe and his patients during the Second World War through the lives of several fictional characters. It is a poignant celebration of the human spirit and a wonderful love story.

Told from three points of view, the novel tells the story of the surgeon, an American airman who becomes one of his patients and the girl the airman loves, as each of them navigates the journey through serious injury and disfigurement to recovery and embracing life again.

The Beauty Shop is a very engaging tale about a fascinating facet of Second World War history. It's also a simple story about characters that the reader can't help caring about, told with humour and understanding. I recommend this novel to anyone who enjoys a good, powerful story.

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## **Lucy-May says**

I honestly have no idea how I can even begin to write a review worthy of this book; I waited so long to hold a copy and the wait was totally worth it.

Archie McIndoe was an incredible man, but one I had never heard of before reading this book; which is a crime. This man deserves to be ingrained in the memories of everyone.

Extended Review: <https://wp.me/p8MbIo-m2>

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## **Heather C says**

The first place that you start with any book is the experience a reader has with the cover of the book, and the cover of this one is gorgeous...but deceiving. As is the title. And I think these items are extremely important to discuss upfront as it might change your mind about deciding to read the book. The book cover and the title appears to allude to this being a typical women's fiction novel, possibly set in a gossipy beauty shop. But that couldn't be further from the truth! The Beauty Shop is a war novel that focuses of three main points-of-view: Mac, an American Air Force pilot; Stella, a member of the WAAF; and Dr. McIndoe, a renowned plastic surgeon. And the titular Beauty Shop isn't a place ladies go to get their hair done, it is actually a surgical ward where those who have endured the worst of burn and crush injuries in the war effort go to be put back together. A VERY different concept given the context!

This novel has a little bit of everything. It is part a romance novel, as Stella is pulled between two men and faces the trials and tribulations of love during wartime. I loved getting to see the relationship with Stella and Mac grow, but could also understand her continued relationship with Alex. It was complex and fulfilling. It is also part war novel set on the home front. Stella and her friend work in the WAAF and we get a glimpse of their lives. We also see how men would let off steam and how they lived on the base in between missions. We experience what it was like for men who were terribly injured and disfigured during crash landings and the hope that Dr. McIndoe was able to bring to them with the ministrations he provided in his "beauty shop". It is also a novel of the battlefield – in the air! There are some mean dogfights and bombing missions that are featured here and these were some of the scenes that I couldn't wait for. They were full of tension, and fear, and drama. I was thrilled with how the author was able to juggle these three elements and create a cohesive

story that feels like a full wartime experience.

I didn't want to put this book down! I awaited the bombing mission scenes because they were full of tension, but I was always unsure of if they would be coming back home. This was extremely appropriate because I'm sure that is how many of those men felt while actually on those missions. The scenes set in the hospital ward were also fascinating because of all the innovative medicine that Dr. McIndoe was practicing (we get an in-depth look at how a nose was re-crafted and the many hardships that could come along with it). While it isn't grossly detailed, it is enough for you to get the picture. I felt for the men who were experiencing these hardships and thought the things that Dr. McIndoe was doing at that time with regard to the social experience of those who were disfigured was fascinating and ahead of its time. If any of the characters grated at me it would have to be Stella. While I enjoyed her for the most part, some of her decision-making process made me frustrated, even if I can understand her reasons.

Overall, this was a stellar read and I am so glad that I was encouraged to read it by a friend. My main goal here is to make sure this book doesn't get overlooked because of a title that while technically perfect, upon initial glance provides a very different expected experience than that which it truly offers.

This review was previously posted at The Maiden's Court blog.

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### **Leigh Holland says**

#### Warning: May Contain Spoilers

I was raised by the Greatest Generation, the men and women of World War II. My grandfather and seven great-uncles served in World War II; two of whom were at Pearl Harbor, although only one of the pair ever made it home. I sat at their feet as a child, drinking in their stories. My heart felt heavy for the depth of the losses they'd suffered. Although *The Beauty Shop* is fiction, it felt as real to me as those stories I heard firsthand as a little girl.

The historical aspects of the book are impeccable. Never once did I think something was amiss, out of time or place. The author knew the historical period and place and rendered an immersive experience. The descriptive devices brought to bear the horrors of war. The stories of the misfortunes of the minor characters drove home the reality that death could come at any time during war; however, hope remains.

Written in third person narrative style, we follow two heroes through the tale: Archibald "Archie" McIndoe and John "Mac" MacKenzie. Archie is a surgeon, helping pilots who suffered severe burns using the latest techniques. Archie is not a warrior, proving one does not need to fight in a war to be one of the heroes of it. Archie will go to any length to try to restore these men, not just physically, but emotionally as well. Mac is an American fighter pilot who falls in love with Stella, an English girl. Although Stella is with another man, Alex, Mac remains persistent in his efforts to win her over. After Alex mistreats Stella, Stella decides to end their relationship and be with Mac. Mac, however, suffers severe burns when he heroically goes back to the burning wreckage of his plane to save his friend. Archie treats Mac for his burns and helps him see that pushing Stella away would be the wrong choice for both Mac and Stella.

I enjoyed reading *The Beauty Shop*. Characters were well developed and the book was well written. I felt an array of emotions over the course of the story. I smiled, I gasped in horror, I cried, I yelled, "No, you fool, run after her!" I'd recommend this book to anyone who enjoys historical romance.

See my other reviews at <https://leighholland.com/>

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### **Elinor says**

The best part about this novel is the light that it sheds on a little-known aspect of wartime history, the British hospital at East Grinstead that treated badly burned airmen. The main character is an American flyer, the love interest is British, but the real hero of the book is the surgeon who worked tirelessly to bring burn victims back from the brink. I really appreciate the research done by author Suzy Henderson to preserve this small but important slice of the past.

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### **Cynthia Hamilton says**

“The Beauty Shop” is a euphemism for the 3rd Ward in an English hospital during WWII, where one courageous doctor—Archie McIndoe—performs miracles of plastic surgery on the young men disfigured during their heroic efforts to defeat Hitler. The war has been taking its toll on all of Europe for years; getting by with very little food, heat and other staples has become a dreary way of life. So has the number of casualties. There are few men left on the home front, and those returning have paid a hefty price.

It’s a testament to the resilience of human beings that the soldiers passing through the small towns in England have no trouble finding welcoming hearts. Love blossoms like foliage on the equator, though its lifespan is uncertain. Soldiers ship out, leaving anxious hearts behind. Many are killed. Some return with crippling injuries, some burnt beyond recognition. Only one man stands between them and a life of agony and utter despair. Against unfathomable odds, he manages to transform these soldiers back into men who can function and feel comfortable in their own skin again.

What makes this story of sacrifice and hardship and love even more powerful is its portrayal of real events. Dr. Archibald McIndoe was a plastic surgeon from New Zealand with innovative ideas. He used his unflinching determination and skill to rehabilitate young airman, body and soul, even as his own hands began to fail him. What I love most about the story is the author’s notes at the end of the book. It’s easy to see why she was inspired to write about the Guinea Pig Club and the life that sprang up in the wake of such horrific events. Kudos to Suzy Henderson for such a wonderful story!

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### **Erin says**

Interview with author: <http://historicalfictionreader.blogspot.com>

Find this and other reviews at: <http://historicalfictionreader.blogspot.com>

My friends and acquaintances are used to my tastes and rarely question my affinity for war era fiction, but I'd be lying if I said that Suzy Henderson's *The Beauty Shop* didn't raise a few eyebrows. The first person to notice accused me of getting soft as I was obviously reading a story that takes place in a hair salon. The second sarcastically asked me to explain the role guinea pigs played in the greatest conflict of the twentieth century. Both individuals were surprised when I set the record straight, but the two incidents emphasized how easy it misinterprets the nature and scope of this surprising debut.

For those feeling a little lost, the novel's title is actually a reference to Ward III at the Queen Victoria

Hospital in East Grinstead. Headed by Dr. Archibald McIndoe, the ward was tasked with the treatment of airmen who suffered disfiguring burns and/or crash-related injuries in the line of duty. The work was challenging on its own, but it was complicated by the emotional instability of the patients and the staff was forced to turn to both the experimental and unorthodox in their effort to restore the independence, self-image, and well-being of the men they served. Recognizing the humor of their situation, the airman likened themselves to guinea pigs and formed a mutual support network that would total more than six hundred by the end of the war. Their willingness to go under the knife led to revolutionary gains in the field of plastic surgery and gave rise to a legacy that is both extraordinary and humbling.

The Beauty Shop pays tribute to this lesser-known chapter of the war by chronicling the fictional experiences of a young American pilot, his girl, and his surgeon. I personally found Mac and Stella interesting in their own ways, but it was Henderson's characterization of McIndoe and her recreation of his ward that set the book apart in my eyes. I felt the author's illustration of the charismatic surgeon and his innovative approach to treating both the body and the mind fascinating and feel the narrative as a whole gives unique insight to war era medicine and the personnel at the forefront of its development.

Parts of the narrative, namely Stella's love life, felt needlessly complex and I think that Henderson could have done more with the supporting cast, but in looking back on the time I spent with the novel I think it safe to say that its strengths outweigh its weaknesses. Henderson has room to grow as a storyteller, but her debut release speaks to both the creativity and compassion of her pen and I for one can't wait to see how she'll channel those talents into her next project. Highly recommended to fans of light romance and world war historicals.

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