



Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe

By Deborah Dwork

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Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe By Deborah Dwork

“The little children had little parents in the [twins’] block [in Auschwitz]. For example, I was a little mama for twins, two girls named Evichka and Hanka...My sister was the mother for Hanka and I was the mother for Evichka...Evichka told me that she got a mother and a father, but that they had gone away on transport. The twins were four years old. I said to her, ‘I will be your mother.’ She said, ‘But you are only sixteen years old; it doesn’t matter?’ I said, ‘No, it doesn’t matter because it is more important that we are together and that we are not alone. You have a mother and I have a daughter.’” —Magda Somogyi

Many books have been written about the experiences of Jews in Nazi Europe. None, however, has focused on the persecution of the most vulnerable members of the Jewish community—its children. This powerful and moving book by Deborah Dwork relates the history of these children for the first time.

The book is based on hundreds of oral histories conducted with survivors who were children in the Holocaust, in Europe and North America, an extraordinary range of primary documentation uncovered by the author (including diaries, letters, photographs and family albums), and archival records. Drawing on these sources, Dwork reveals the feelings, daily activities, and perceptions of Jewish children who lived and died in the shadow of the Holocaust. She reconstructs and analyzes the many different experiences the children faced. In the early years of Nazi domination they lived at home, increasingly opposed by rising anti-Semitism. Later some went into hiding while others attempted to live openly on gentile papers. As time passed, increasing numbers were forced into transit camps, ghettos, and death and slave labor camps. Although nearly ninety percent of the Jewish children in Nazi Europe were murdered, we learn in this history not of their deaths but of the circumstances of their lives.

Children with a Star is a major new contribution to the history of Europe during the Nazi era. It explains from a different perspective how European society functioned during the wary years, how the German noose tightened, and how the Jewish victims and their gentile neighbors responded. It expands the definition of

resistance by examining the history of the people—primarily women—who helped Jewish children during the war. By focusing on children, it strips away rationalizations that the victims of Nazism somehow “allowed or “deserved” their punishment. And by examining the experience of children and thereby laying bare how society functions at its most fundamental level, it not only provides a unique understanding of the Holocaust but a new theoretical approach to the study of history.

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Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe By Deborah Dwork Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1374223 in Books
- Published on: 1993-09-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .89" w x 5.98" l, 1.27 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 380 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The Nazis' murder of 1.5 million Jewish children is the focus of this pioneering study. Expelled from school, forced to wear the yellow star, Jewish children in German-occupied Europe had their family lives shattered by anti-Semitic legislation prior to the outbreak of war. Later some hid in attics or forests; others concealed their identities but remained visible, constantly threatened by starvation, disease or selection for the gas chambers. Yet, Yale scholar Dwork demonstrates, Jewish children created their own mental space, where play, love and relationships continued amid the evil and horror. Tapping letters, diaries, drawings and oral histories of survivors, Dwork adds a poignant new dimension to Holocaust studies.

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From School Library Journal

YA-- A poignant and gripping story by an author who writes with a heart. Dwork begins her history by reiterating the grim statistic that only 11 percent of European Jewish children survived the war and that over one and a half million children were killed. She documents her narrative by weaving personal recollections of survivors and entries from their diaries. Readers will be transfixed by the children's daily lives--the ordinariness as well as the atrocities. A new dimension in books about the Holocaust. --Mary Quinn, Fairfax County Pub. Lib., VA

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From Library Journal

By focusing on the shattering experiences and daily routines of children during the period of Nazi domination in Europe, Dwork succeeds in illuminating a previously unexplored chapter of social history. Relying heavily on quotations from diaries, letters, and interviews, garnered through extensive research, Dwork describes daily living as seen through the eyes of children. She plumbs the sorrows of parents desperately trying to save their children by placing them with foster Christian families through various formal and informal networks that operated throughout Europe. And she chronicles the pitiful attempts to cling to some semblance of normalcy amidst the inhuman, bizarre conditions in the ghettos and the concentration camps. Only ten percent of Jewish children survived the Nazi onslaught. Dwork's powerful book gives new meaning to this numbing statistic.

-Carol R. Glatt, VA Medical Ctr. Lib., Philadelphia

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