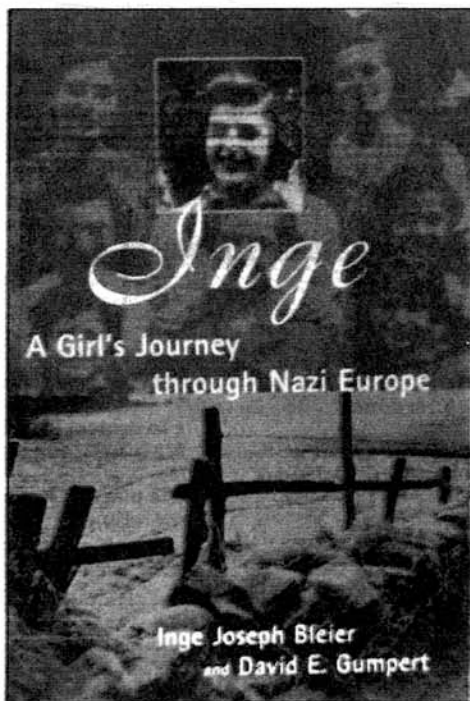


"I was happy to be with a crowd of kids, but there were no relatives."

EDITH GOLDAPPER ROSENTHAL

Hid in a castle with other Jewish children

A Tale Of Survivors



A book is based on a memoir left by one of the "Children of The Hille," Inge Joseph Bleier. Goldapper Rosenthal is in the upper right corner on the book's cover.

SAVING THE CHILDREN

Belgium took in roughly 500 Jewish children after the Nazis staged an attack throughout Germany on Jews on the "Night of Broken Glass," or Kristallnacht, in November 1938. Of these 500, 100 eventually landed at the Chateau de la Hille in southern France. The move to Belgium of the 500 children is considered by some to be the second kindertransport. In the original kindertransport, the United Kingdom eased immigration restrictions to accept 10,000 Jewish children.



Goldapper family photo

Goldapper Rosenthal's parents arranged for her to move to Belgium after their native Austria was invaded by Nazis.

"You can't move [in the packed boxcar] and we had nothing to eat."

EDITH GOLDAPPER ROSENTHAL

On escaping into France from Belgium

A new book tells the story of how 100 Jewish children hid from Nazis in a castle in German-occupied France during World War II.

BY STEPHEN THOMPSON
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PINELLAS PARK — In the group picture, Edith Goldapper is the one in the back row, farthest to the right. If her smile seems restrained compared with those of the younger girls in the photograph, maybe it's because she better knows how precarious their existence is.

The place is Brussels, the date is Sept. 17, 1939. The Nazis had already invaded Goldapper's native Austria, and her parents, who would later die in a concentration camp, had arranged for her to be transported to Belgium.

The parents of the other seven Jewish girls in the photograph had arranged for their transport, too, from either Austria or Germany.

But the reprieve was short-lived. The Nazis then invaded Belgium, and the children had to escape once again, this time to an old, dilapidated castle in southern France called the Chateau de la Hille. Ninety-two other children escaped there with them.

This little-known chapter of Holocaust history is the backdrop for "Inge: A Girl's Journey through Nazi Europe," which is based on a 66-page memoir left by one of the "Children of The Hille," Inge Joseph Bleier.

Bleier, too, is in that photograph with Goldapper; it is used for the cover of the book, which was written by Bleier's nephew, David E. Gumpert, and released last month.

Those who survived the experience are

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The children turn castle into a home.

spread throughout the world, if they haven't died of old age. Goldapper, 79, and who goes by the name Edith "Edie" Goldapper Rosenthal, lives in a Pinellas Park 55-and-over condominium complex with her husband, Carl.

She is one of only two of the Children of the Hille living in Florida.

The Nazis eventually invaded France, and once again the children had to escape, most of them with the help of French resistance fighters or the Swiss Red Cross.

But it grew increasingly difficult. Security at borders tightened. Guides ostensibly for hire to bring foreigners through treacherous mountain passes were sometimes in league with the Gestapo.

Goldapper managed to elude the Nazis; Bleier eluded them, too, but not her own demons.

A handful of other children did not make it.

A Home Away From Home. For A Time.

From Brussels, the 100 children — 50 boys, 50 girls — climbed into two box cars on a freight train and escaped to France, Goldapper Rosenthal said in a recent interview at her condominium. It was in the spring of 1940.

The person who arranged for the trip was the director of a girls home where the girls had been living, Goldapper Rosenthal said. He had some influence because his brother worked in the Belgium government, she said.

During the trek south, the children could hear the German bombs. But for the handouts they received whenever the train stopped in the French countryside, they had little for sustenance.

"It was not a very pleasant trip, as you can imagine," Goldapper Rosenthal said. "You can't move [in the packed boxcar] and we had nothing to eat."

Once in France, the Swiss Red Cross made the castle available to the children. In "Inge," Gumpert details how they transformed the place into something inhabitable. Goldapper Rosenthal remembers how a boy considered good with his hands installed electricity. She provided diversion playing a piano.

Only a handful of adults — a former Belgian soldier, a nurse from the Swiss Red Cross — oversaw the children's activities.

"I was happy to be with a crowd of kids, but there were no relatives," Goldapper Rosenthal said. "It's not an easy thing."

Then the Germans invaded France, and at the end of August, 1942, the French gendarmes arrived at the chateau to take all the children who were 16 and over to a concentration camp.

A Swiss Red Cross official won the children's release, however, by threatening to stop taking French children into Switzerland for months-long stays, during which the French children could eat better than they could in Nazi-occupied France,

where rationing was the norm, Goldapper Rosenthal said.

Still, the youngsters and the adults helping them realized the children had to escape, either into Switzerland or through the treacherous Pyrenees mountain passes into Spain. Otherwise, they would eventually have landed in the camps.

The Great Escapes

Gumpert's book focuses on Bleier's escape, and it is both heroic and fraught with sadness.

Without giving away too much of the account, Gumpert's aunt was haunted by what she perceived to be her own missteps in a plan. Four of her friends, she believed, including her boyfriend, may have died as a result. Bleier slipped away from the Nazis by jumping out a bathroom window.

Goldapper Rosenthal's escape was less climactic, but also had its share of close calls.

The way Goldapper Rosenthal tells it, she and another Jewish girl were instructed by a Swiss teacher at the castle to make their way to the home of a French resistance fighter who lived near the Swiss border.

The pair walked 25 kilometers to catch a train to Lyon, where they waited for some time for a bus. One night, they stayed in a building they were told wouldn't be occupied until 6 a.m.; it was a good thing they left because the people using the building during the daylight hours were the Gestapo.

The girls stopped in at a restaurant, and when Goldapper Rosenthal heard German music, she started to sing. Her companion kicked her under the table. They passed more time by sleeping through a French movie before taking the bus to Champagnol, near the Swiss border, where they stayed with a French resistance fighter and the fighter's sister, Goldapper Rosenthal said.

One day, the resistance fighter, whose name was Victoria, told Goldapper Rosenthal that they, along with a third person, were going to climb into the mountains that night and cross the border into Switzerland. With a knapsack on her back, Edith climbed and climbed. Once in Swit-

zerland, Victoria threw a snowball through the open window of a house, a signal that some fugitives had just arrived, Goldapper Rosenthal said.

It was 1943, and freedom was brief. Once Swiss authorities found out Goldapper Rosenthal had entered the country illegally, she was put first in a prison, then a camp, and then into a series of girls homes, in which she stayed until two years after the war ended, mainly because no one knew what to do with a young woman with no family, she said.

Despite her travails, Goldapper Rosenthal realizes she is among the lucky ones.

According to Walter Reed, another child of The Hille who has kept a tally of the 100, a handful didn't survive: Inge's traveling companions, plus two who put their faith in a Pyrenees guide who handed them over to the Gestapo ensuring their deaths.

Bleier, the subject of the book, later committed suicide after moving to the United States.

Keeping Memories Alive

Goldapper Rosenthal speaks excitedly of her adventures as a child of The Hille, and she recalls specific times and dates. She, too, has jotted down her reminiscences and has made them available to the Holocaust museum in Washington, and to a Swiss writer who later published a book in 1992. The book was translated into French.

"There are a lot of chapters where I am," Goldapper Rosenthal said in reference to the book, "Die Kinder von Schloss La Hille" (The Children of The Hille Castle).

In Gumpert's book, she makes relatively few appearances, but in them, she is described as a talented piano player who loved to organize skits and plays for entertainment at the chateau.

In one gut-wrenching passage, Goldapper Rosenthal finds out at the castle that her parents have been sent to the camps. She starts crying, especially over her father's demise. He had fought for the Austrians in World War I and lost his sight in both eyes doing so.

"Now they try to kill him?" Gumpert quotes Goldapper Rosenthal as saying. She estimates 50 to 75 members of her extended family, perhaps more, died in the camps.

One thing her parents managed to do before their deportation was to put a piano in storage for Edith. She eventually had it brought to the United States and it now sits in the living room of her condominium in Pinellas Park.

She plays it occasionally.