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## How a young girl escaped from the Nazi clutches

David Gumpert to recount his aunt's journey through Nazi Europe at April 21 service at Temple Beth Shalom

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NEEDHAM — In the well-documented World War II Kindertransport, 10,000 Jewish children were sent to England to live with foster families. But there

were several hundred additional child refugees who were sent to Belgium and other continental European countries, following Hitler's 1940 invasion of Germany and Austria.

Inge Joseph Bleier was among a group of 100 such children, aged three to 19, who escaped from Belgium to southern France. With no foster families, only each other and a few inexperienced adults to look after them, they lived in a goat barn and a chateau until they were arrested and sent to a French concentration camp. Bleier, who embarked on a series of escapes, miraculously survived along with

90 of the 100.

On Wednesday, April 21, at 7:30 p.m., her nephew, author David E. Gumpert, will discuss his work, "Inge: A Girl's Journey through Nazi Europe," during Temple Beth Shalom's Yom HaShoah service. Gumpert and his wife Jean, who have two grown children, Laura and Jason, have been members there for 24 years.

Gumpert's book relates Bleier's teenage years in 1930s Germany and how, after Kristallnacht, her family was broken apart and she was sent alone to Brussels to live with wealthy relatives. She wound up during 1941 and 1942

in a 15th-century chateau in southern France, where amid vegetable gardens, soccer, Beethoven and Schubert, she lived normally, even

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**David Gumpert**

finding a boyfriend, until August 1942, when French gendarmes burst in and helped transport them to Auschwitz. The resultant life-and-death decisions made by Bleier were to haunt her for the rest of her life.

Gumpert, who holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Chicago and a master's in journalism from Columbia University, has been a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* and an editor at *Inc. Magazine* and *The Harvard Business Review*.

For this work, he drew from the

66-page manuscript of his late aunt, who was a graduate of the University of Illinois school of nursing. She became a registered nurse, headed the obstetrics department at Chicago's Weiss Memorial Hospital and authored nursing textbooks. She died in June 1983. Gumpert, who normally writes about entrepreneurship and small business issues, also used letters, recollections of friends and relatives.

"It is a poignant and powerful Holocaust story," said former U.S. Holocaust Museum Research Institute Director Michael Berenbaum. "Unlike Anne Frank, Inge Joseph was separated from her family as a young teen and spent the war years a few steps ahead of the Germans," observed Lawrence Langer, a frequent lecturer on the Holocaust who has authored "Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory."

"She and I were both introverts who loved to write," observed Gumpert, who noted that his aunt earned her master's degree in journalism when she was in her 40s. Bleier gave him thoughtful presents when he was a child, and frequently telephoned he and his

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wife with parenting advice.

"As wonderful as she was, she was also temperamental, and seemed to become more so as she got older," he recalled. "I knew she was having increasing difficulties with her husband, daughter and sister, who is my mother."

Gumpert said that his aunt rarely spoke about her Holocaust experiences. "I remember her once saying to my sister and me when we were quarreling as teenagers, 'I wish I had such things to worry about when I was your age.'"

Following her death, Gumpert visited Inge's daughter, Julie, who gave him the manuscript Bleier had written in 1959, which described her entire experience.

"As I read it, I understood Inge's torment, especially in her later years, when she became so temperamental and prone to illness. I felt terrible that I had not known more about her experiences when she was alive, so that some-

how I might have tried to comfort her," he said. He decided to memorialize her bravery and the bravery of those who were with her.

The book, which took over 10 years to complete, was a very complex project, as each of her fellow child refugees had a different viewpoint. "Different people remembered the same incidents in different ways, sometimes completely opposite, or not at all," he said. "But I wanted to keep the book as true to Inge's voice as possible, to fully reflect her experiences and feelings. I went through more rewrites of the book than I care to think about."

Gumpert's family has been supportive, given that some family members, as he acknowledges, "don't come off smelling like roses." A few relatives did not want it published: "They just want to forget, and I can understand that. But I feel it is important to try to preserve the past, especially a past as traumatic as that which Inge and other family members experienced."

