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Author brings to life aunt's story of survival

Book tells story of Jewish child in Nazi Europe

By Franceen Shaughnessy
STAFF WRITER

David Gumpert wasn't looking to write a book about the Holocaust. The idea just fell into his lap, literally.

It was roughly 10 years ago when Gumpert, a Needham resident, was presented with his aunt Inge Joseph Bleier's 66-page partial manuscript describing her life as a Jewish child left behind in Europe during Nazism.

"I knew she had hidden out in Europe, but I didn't know the details. My mother [Bleier's older sister] thought she was hidden by nuns," he said. "It was hard for people who didn't grow up in Holocaust homes. They didn't understand that [survivors] didn't want to talk about it."

As Gumpert, 57, read the partial manuscript, he started to learn more about his aunt's ordeal and realized that he needed to finish the story.

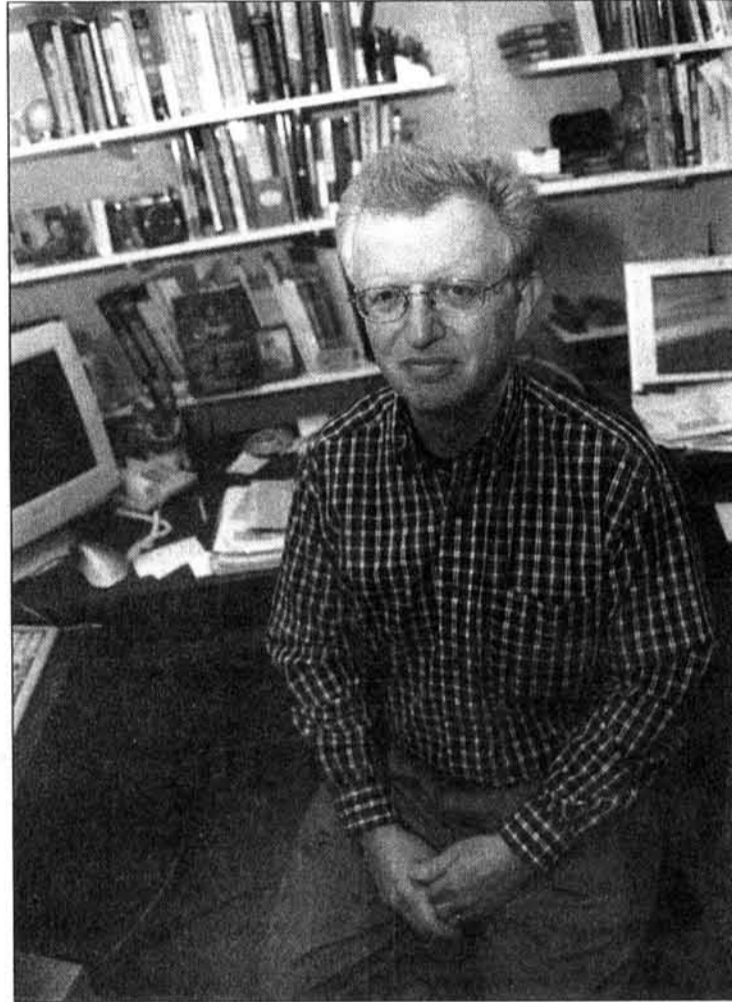
"I thought, 'Wow, this is an amazing story,' and I wanted to try to flush it out," he said.

It was already typed up, and Gumpert said he thought he would fulfill his aunt's goal and "carry it through."

And so was the creation of "Inge: A Girl's Journey through Nazi Europe" by Bleier and Gumpert.

Gumpert, a journalist and author of several business books, said the research and writing took roughly 10 years. The book was published in late April and is available in various bookstores and on Amazon.com.

He said he began the research process by trying to locate some people who were mentioned in the



Needham's David Gumpert tells the stories of his late aunt, a Holocaust survivor, in his recently released book.

manuscript. Gumpert said his uncle put him in touch with one woman who remained friends with Bleier.

"I called her up and it turned out that she was in touch with others. A lot of them stayed in close touch with each other," he said. "I was plugged into the network and I interviewed people who were with Inge."

He said he also relied on letters that were written to his mother from Bleier, documents from the Swiss Red Cross and a memoir that was written by another girl who knew his aunt.

"It was like a big puzzle," he said. "I went through a lot of rewrites. I wanted to write true to what Inge originally did, but I also wanted it to be engaging for readers."

Gumpert said along the way he learned a lot about his aunt and his family.

"I learned a lot about Inge's suffering," he said. "I learned about what she had experienced and how it haunted her. I learned a lot about my own family. Most people don't know much about their own family beyond their own grandparents. I learned about her own struggles. I learned about the history of World War II and the Holocaust."

Throughout the years of research and writing, Gumpert said he enjoyed retracing Bleier's steps to freedom.

He said he visited the chateau and a goat barn where his aunt stayed during her journey. "The

barn still smelled."

When Bleier was staying at the goat barn, some of the children made drawings on the walls, and Gumpert said those drawings were still there when he visited years later.

Even though the book took years to complete, Gumpert said he would still do it again.

"I feel like I have helped her get the recognition she deserves and an explanation of the suffering that she went through," he said.

Gumpert said he was relieved to hear from a few of the survivors who read the novel and gave positive feedback.

"I'm concerned about how they might react and about the accuracy," he said. "People's memories can cloud up [after so many years]. Different people remember different things."

"I'm relieved that overall they are reacting positively," he said.

Fred "Manfred" Manasse, 68, was one of the children mentioned in the book.

Manasse, of Waltham, said he read some of the book and thought it was accurate.

"It's factual as far as I can tell," said Manasse, who was only 4 at the time of the Holocaust.

He said he doesn't remember it to be too bad of an existence.

"I was always hungry, and I didn't like it when they ran metal combs through my hair to get the lice out," he said. "It was sort of like being in perpetual camp. I was happy. I could do whatever I wanted to. I played games."

But Manasse, who escaped to the United States with his brother in 1945, said it was clear that the trauma affected him because he would wet his bed and throw temper tantrums.

"I wasn't tortured," he said, "but the fact that I missed a normal upbringing was very significant in my development."

David Gumpert will read from "Inge: A Girl's Journey through Nazi Europe" at 7 p.m. on June 15 at Barnes & Noble, 90 Providence Highway/Route 1, Walpole. For more information, visit www.davidgumpert.com.

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