AWESOME stories

Teenagers in the Holocaust

When World War II enveloped Europe, children throughout the continent were impacted. Many children were sent to concentration camps while others became part of their country's Resistance Movements, opposing Nazi orders and policies.

Sometimes authors use the story of real children to write historical novels. Sometimes the real stories are as compelling as the fictional ones.

Take *Shadow on the Mountain*, for example. Espen, the main character, is based on Erling Storrusten. Who was he? What role did he play during the war?

When Germany invaded Norway, Erling's country, he decided to fight back. Sixteen at the time of the invasion, in 1940, Erling became a courier for distributing forbidden and illegal underground newspapers.

As time went by, and Erling grew older during the war, he took-on more resistance responsibilities. During one key event, he pretended to be who he was not in order to gain entrance into Germany's headquarters in Lillehammer, Erling's home town. He was able to draw the layout of the headquarters, then turn that important document over to Resistance leaders.

When the German secret police, the Gestapo, learned Erling's identity, he had to flee Norway. Traveling hundreds of miles over five days, mostly on skis, he reached safety in Sweden. Margi Preus has retold Erling's story in *Shadow on the Mountain*.

Joan Wolf takes a similar approach in her story *Someone Named Eva*. Although she doesn't have a specific character on which to model her heroine, Wolf uses the events of a town called Lidice as the backdrop of her tale.

Hitler believed that people in the Czech town of Lidice were providing shelter for the assassins of one of the Fuhrer's top men. Women and children were rounded-up, and seven children were initially selected for Germany's "Lebensborn" program.

The Lebensborn program, devised by SS head Heinrich Himmler, focused on children who had Nordic features like blue eyes and blond hair. Nazi policy allowed those children to be kidnapped from their parents, then sent to centers where they would be "Germanized" (before being sent to live with German families who supported Hitler and his Third-Reich ideas).

Once those children were examined and measured, to be sure they fit the "Aryan" profile, they had to learn German customs and the German language. In the case of Milada, the heroine of *Someone Named Eva*, that process took two years.

During that entire two years, the twelve-year-old Czech girl was forbidden to speak her own language and was not allowed to see her real family.

In truth, the men of her family would have no-longer been alive since the Nazis killed all of the men of Lidice in retaliation for the death of Hitler's protégé. Whether the townspeople were actually hiding the partisans who shot Reinhard Heydrich seemed not to matter. The Nazis' perception of responsibility was enough for them to destroy the town and kill the men.

When she is sent to live with a German family, Milada is now known as Eva. With her Nordic features, she fits into her new life, but (as her Grandmother had insisted before they were parted), she must also remember who she really is.

At the end of the war, Eva/Milada struggles with leaving her foster family whom she has grown to like.

In real life, there were people who returned to a rebuilt Lidice after the war. Only 153 women and 17 children survived, however. In her story, Joan Wolf makes two of those people Milada (*Someone Named Eva*) and her mother (who'd spent the war, like other Lidice women, at the Ravensbruck concentration camp).

In both of these cases, the hero and the heroine of fictional novels have their roots in real-life events. Their lives were profoundly disrupted by the war, in major ways, but neither of these individuals was Jewish. That fact helps us to realize the impact of Hitler's policies was widespread throughout the European continent, negatively effecting the lives of many different nationalities.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Teenagers-in-the-Holocaust

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Media Stream

Jewish and non-Jewish Children

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Someone Named Eva by Joan M. Wolf

When people think about "The Holocaust," what first comes to mind are concentration camps, killing centers and the decimation of Jews, Roma ("gypsies) and other individuals disdained by Hitler and his Third Reich.

What does not immediately come to mind are the children, throughout German-occupied Europe, who were subjected to kidnapping from their families under the "Lebensborn" program.

Joan Wolf's book—*Someone Named Eva*—tells a fictional story about a young Czech girl who is forced into the *Lebensborn* nightmare.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the book's publisher, provides an overview of the novel:

On the night Nazi soldiers come to her home in Czechoslovakia, Milada's grandmother says, "Remember, Milada. Remember who you are. Always." Milada promises, but she doesn't understand her grandmother's words. After all, she is Milada, who lives with her mama and papa, her brother and sister, and her beloved Babichka. Milada, eleven years old, the fastest runner in school. How could she ever forget?

Then the Nazis take Milada away from her family and send her to a Lebensborn center in Poland. There, she is told she fits the Aryan ideal: her blond hair and blue eyes are the right color; her head and nose, the right size. She is given a new name, Eva, and trained to become the perfect German citizen, to be the hope of Germany's future—and to forget she was ever a Czech girl named Milada.

Inspired by real events, this fascinating novel sheds light on a little-known aspect of the Nazi agenda and movingly portrays a young girl's struggle to hold on to her identity and her hope in the face of a regime intent on destroying both.

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Image and quoted intro online via Google Books.

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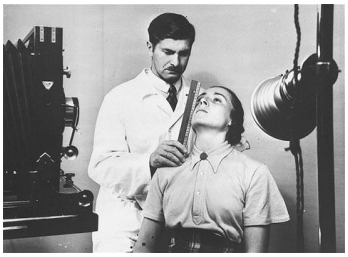

Lebensborn - Head Measurements and Racial Ancestry

During the Nazi era, in Germany, Hitler and his supporters were obsessed with racial identity. The "Lebensborn" program was part of the Third Reich's effort to expand the Aryan race. Before children could be sent to foster parents, or to adoptive parents, health-care employees would first have to examine them to determine whether their ancestry was acceptable to the Nazi regime. This photo depicts part of what happened during the "measurement" process. We learn more about this image from the U.S. National Archives, where the picture is maintained:

At the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics, a racial hygienist measures a woman's features in an attempt to determine her racial ancestry. Berlin, Germany, date uncertain.

Image, described above, online via the U.S. National Archives.

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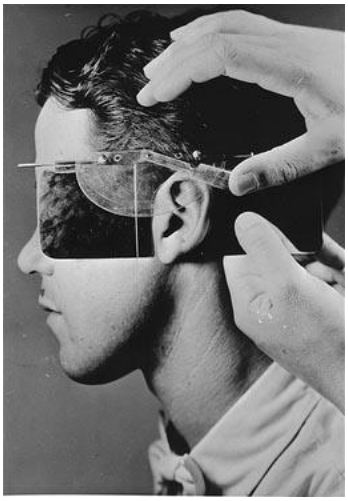

Lebensborn - Measuring for Racial Descent

To assess a person's racial descent, doctors employed during Germany's Nazi-era would measure a person's physicial characteristics, such as the size of one's ear.

The U.S. National Archives, where this photo is maintained, tells us more about the image:

Establishing racial descent by measuring an ear at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology. Germany, date uncertain.

Image online via the U.S. National Archives.

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Norway's Resistance - Hiding Illegal News in Wood

During the Nazi occupation of Norway, Josef Terboven and his "government" made it a crime for Norwegians to hear or read any news which was not Nazi-issued or approved.

Disregarding such orders, Norwegians listened to foreign radio broadcasts, then wrote-up the news in illegal newspapers.

Couriers, like Erling Storrusten, distributed the news to people willing to risk punishment. After reading the news, consumers burned all evidence of the underground newspapers.

In this image, we see illegal papers hidden in wood. The artifact is maintained at Norway's Resistance Museum (*Norges Hjemmefront Museum*).

Image, described above, online via Trip Advisor.

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