

Forced Journey: The Saga of Werner Berlinger

Rosemary Zibart

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Stories of people who suffered during World War II fill shelves of libraries and bookstores, yet readers never seem to lose interest in the most-innocent victims of global warfare—the children. Rosemary Zibart presents a touching dramatization of a twelve-year-old Jewish boy sent to America on September 1, 1939, to escape the Holocaust danger lurking in Nazi Germany.

In *Forced Journey: The Saga of Werner Berlinger*, the title character boards a ship with the lingering hope of reuniting with his father and younger sister Bettina as soon as they can safely make the trip. Alone and scared, he sails to the United States as a refugee, meeting a sweet girl named Anika along the way. Upon reaching the rough and rowdy streets of New York, they must part company as she joins an austere, wealthy family to live in an upscale apartment building near Central Park.

In a less-affluent area, Werner can find comfort only in the hope that his handicapped sponsor, Esther, a polio-stricken woman in a wheelchair, will be a good substitute mother. Caring for her daily needs is his responsibility, but fitting into this new, sophisticated city will be difficult, even with a loyal friend named Sam at his side.

Forced Journey is the second book in Zibart's series about displaced and relocated children and teens. The book is a collection of heartwarming yet painful accounts of youth struggling to adapt to foreign environments from 1939 to 1945, a tumultuous period in world history. Loosely based on true events, these fictionalized characters are imbued with a realism that helps create vivid personality portraits, as seen in children like Werner Berlinger, a curious, resilient boy on the cusp of puberty. Few adults would exhibit the courage and stamina evident in his psyche as he explores his surroundings with enthusiasm and trepidation.

Zibart offers readers a vivid glimpse of the sheer will to live that must control burgeoning fear and anxiety in a strange, somewhat hostile, environment: "All morning his stomach had been tossed by a jumble of emotions—excitement, worry, joy and sadness. Leaving the ship meant taking one more step away from everything he knew—away from Father and Bettina and toward an unknown future. Already he could hear the jabber of that strange language, English. And he couldn't understand a single word."

Rosemary Zibart is an award-winning playwright and inspirational author known for her support of children's rights. Informative without resorting to a pedantic delivery, this professionally packaged book is a well-edited adventure that will appeal to young readers wanting entertainment as well as teachers seeking quality literature for the classroom. Zibart emphasizes unfair practices and insensitive resistance to immigrants in an era when no one could afford to let anyone, not even a child, have a discounted ticket to freedom.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (March 11, 2013)

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