



Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust

By Michael Gruenbaum

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Resilience shines throughout Michael Gruenbaum's "riveting memoir" (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review) about his time in the Terezin concentration camp during the Holocaust, in this National Jewish Book award finalist and Parents Choice Gold medal award winning title, an ideal companion to the bestselling *Boy on the Wooden Box*.

Michael "Misha" Gruenbaum enjoyed a carefree childhood playing games and taking walks through Prague with his beloved father. All of that changed forever when the Nazis invaded Prague. The Gruenbaum family was forced to move into the Jewish Ghetto in Prague. Then, after a devastating loss, Michael, his mother and sister were deported to the Terezin concentration camp.

At Terezin, Misha roomed with forty other boys who became like brothers to him. Life in Terezin was a bizarre, surreal balance—some days were filled with friendship and soccer matches, while others brought mortal terror as the boys waited to hear the names on each new list of who was being sent "to the East."

Those trains were going to Auschwitz. When the day came that his family's name appeared on a transport list, their survival called for a miracle—one that tied Michael's fate to a carefully sewn teddy bear, and to his mother's unshakeable determination to keep her children safe.

Collaborating with acclaimed author Todd Hasak-Lowy, Michael Gruenbaum shares his inspiring story of hope in an unforgettable memoir that recreates his experiences with stunning immediacy. Michael's story, and the many original documents and photos included alongside it, offer an essential contribution to Holocaust literature.

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Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust By Michael Gruenbaum Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #486794 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-08-25
- Released on: 2015-08-25
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

Review

Written in first-person present-tense narration, this riveting memoir traces the increasingly appalling events that took place from 1939–1945 in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, as seen through the eyes of Gruenbaum. As the book opens, 10-year-old Misha protests his growing awareness of injustice: “Every day is a new, stupid rule and worse food and no soccer.” Watching the German army enter Prague, he feels more curiosity than dread until he sees a couple jump to their death holding hands. Miseries ensue: the ghetto, yellow stars, his father’s murder, increasing danger, hunger, and humiliation—all leading to the family’s arrival in the Terezin concentration camp. There, Misha joins a group of 40 boys who live, work, and play under the stern but loving care of Franta, a young man who calls them the “Nesharim,” and demands high moral character: “We will let nothing separate us from our humanity.” The ingenuity, love, and defiant courage displayed by Misha, his parents, Franta, and others counteract incessant degradation and terror, creating an inspiring testament to human resilience. (Publishers Weekly, *STARRED REVIEW May 25, 2015)

“Young Misha’s narration sets this Holocaust memoir apart from others. Initially unaware of the dark implications of the events, Misha adapted to camp life, playing soccer and making new friends, until he could no longer ignore the truth. His innocence contrasts with what readers (and the adults around Misha) know is going on, which creates a foreboding tone. The use of present-tense narration contributes to the urgency of the narration, and Misha’s sense of fairness and his unfailing faith that things will improve will resonate with students.” (School Library Journal)

“The Holocaust’s horrors are handled delicately for middlegrade readers but never detract from the truth. Photographs and letters add to the memoir’s efficacy and poignancy.” (Booklist)

“Somewhere There is a Sun reads like the private journal of a Czech boy and later teenager, candidly recording his innermost thoughts and feelings on the daily routines of his life from 1939 to 1945. With this book, Michael Gruenbaum has offered the current generation of young readers a very special book that will trigger both emotion and reflection; it is an extremely valuable tool for all of us who are trying to teach teenagers about the Holocaust . ” (Margot Stern Strom, Facing History and Ourselves)

Michael (Misha) Gruenbaum lived an untroubled existence in Prague until the Nazis invaded in 1939, and he documents his life between the ages of nine and 15 in this poignant memoir. Misha’s family was sent to the ghetto, where new and oppressive rules were imposed nearly every day. There, his father was arrested and later was reported to have died of kidney failure. Along with his mother and his sister, Marietta, Misha was eventually sent to the concentration camp Terezin, where his experiences ran the gamut, from the exciting and even enjoyable (staging musicals for the Red Cross) to the horrific (standing in freezing weather for hours for a population count). Eventually, transports to “the East” (Auschwitz-Birkenau) began. Young Misha’s narration sets this Holocaust memoir apart from others. Initially unaware of the dark implications of the events, Misha adapted to camp life, playing soccer and making new friends, until he could no longer ignore the truth. His innocence contrasts with what readers (and the adults around Misha) know is going on, which creates a foreboding tone. The use of present-tense narration contributes to the urgency of the narration, and Misha’s sense of fairness and his unfailing faith that things will improve will resonate with students. Some fictionalizing occurs: coauthor Hasak-Lowy explains in an afterward that he had to “fill in gaps” in the book, such as writing the dialogue. VERDICT An excellent introduction to the Holocaust for those who may not be ready for every grim detail. (School Library Journal July 2015)

As the Nazis march through Prague, nine-year-old Michael “Misha” Gruenbaum witnesses a couple jump to their deaths from a balcony and wonders, “did they know something the rest of us don’t?” Misha also can’t understand why his father is later taken by SS officers, only to be returned in a coffin. The bulk of this memoir, however, focuses on the two-and-a-half years he, his mother, and older sister spent in the Terezin concentration camp. First-person narration lends an immediacy and innocence to the story, as Misha doesn’t always comprehend the significance of events. For instance, he relishes playing soccer with new friends in Terezin, but when these friends are transported “east,” he only later realizes they had been sent to Auschwitz and the gas chamber. With the help of 20-year-old Franta, a father figure to the boys, Misha learns the strength it takes to survive. The Holocaust’s horrors are handled delicately for middle-grade readers but never detract from the truth. Photographs and letters add to the memoir’s efficacy and poignancy. (Booklist June 1, 2015)

“This account will help young readers imagine themselves in the midst of the unimaginable—and will show them how kids very much like them managed to survive.” (M.T. Anderson New York Times Book Review)

This is the memoir of a young Holocaust survivor, Misha Gruenbaum. Misha lived in Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s when German troops took over his country and began targeting Jews. Readers will feel the initial excitement of military parades, the increasing restrictions on Jewish activities, and the atrocities in the Terezin concentration camp. The book is narrated in present tense so that the reader experiences all with Misha. B&W photos and documents are included; the originals of these are now in the Holocaust museum in D.C. The title of this book comes from a letter Mrs. Gruenbaum wrote to relatives after she was liberated in May 1945. This book looks for hope amidst the horror, and shows our responsibility to the future. The book jacket promises a dedicated website with photos and video extras. **Donna Reed, NBCT Library / Media Specialist, Wilson Elementary School, Newark, Delaware [Editor’s Note: Available in e-book format.]**

Recommended (School Library Connection February 2016)

About the Author

Michael Gruenbaum was born in 1930 in Prague, Czechoslovakia. In 1942, he was sent to the concentration camp Theresienstadt, or Terezin, with his mother and sister, and remained there until the end of the war. He emigrated to the United States in 1950, graduated from MIT and Yale, served two years in the Army, and worked for the Boston Redevelopment Authority and Mass. Dept. of Public Works, before cofounding a consulting firm. He was married for fifty years to the late Thelma Gruenbaum, author with *Michael of Nesarim: Child Survivors of Terezin*. He has three sons and four grandchildren.

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Somewhere There Is Still a Sun

March 11, 1939

MY RECORD IS FIFTEEN.

“Why are you rushing, Misha?” Father has been asking ever since we left our apartment. “Slow down,” he kept telling me, nearly laughing, while we were walking along the river. The Vltava. The best river in the world.

He didn't know that I was warming up, getting ready. Because today is the day; I can feel it.

Father likes to take his time. "A person isn't supposed to rush on Shabbat," he's reminded me about five times already. But I can't blame him. He works so hard all week. I mean, he's barely even around most of the time. Some nights he doesn't come home at all. And he's going to London tomorrow, because of his work. I hate it when he's gone, but I guess when you're one of the lawyers for the richest family in Prague you do what they say.

But I have a job too. To break my record. Today.

We're almost at the bridge. The Cechuv. Seagulls are chasing each other along the river, playing their secret games. The castle pokes up at the sky like usual, high above everything. Maybe we can go up there once he gets back from his trip. See the changing of the guards and look at the city down below. I'll ask Father when he's not so annoyed with me.

We turn off the quay and onto the bridge, busy with people and cars. Excellent. Here comes Pavel Goren, our doctor. Who just so happens to have the biggest belly of any doctor anywhere. But why is he walking away from the Old-New Synagogue? Who cares, this is perfect. He'll distract father.

"Shabbat shalom, Pavel," my father says.

"Hello, Karl," Pavel says, and ruffles my hair, his stomach brushing against my ear. "Tell me something, Misha, have you been growing again?"

But I don't answer. Because the bridge is perfect right now. Old men and their canes. Girls chattering with their friends. A couple led by their dog.

"It's Madga; she's ill," Pavel tells my father. "Every year in March, it's the same thing."

I guess I'm supposed to care, but I have more important things to worry about. Plus, I'm sure of it, in a moment they'll be talking about Germany and Hitler and the Nazis, which is all any adult seems to talk about these days. So boring.

Three boys pass us. Bigger than me, but so what?

I'm off.

One of the boys says, "The next World Cup is ours. You'll see."

"No way," the tallest says. "Brazil will beat us. Again."

"Are you crazy?" the third boy says. "Oldrich is only getting better."

"You're both idiots," says the tall one. They stop to argue, pointing their fingers at each other.

Fine with me. I pass them.

One, two, three.

Next is an old man, shuffling along slowly. No problem.

Four.

And two women, one of them pushing a stroller. Unfortunately, babies don't count, but still.

Five, six.

Someday this will be an Olympic event. At least it should be. Prague will host the Olympics, and I'll be a national hero. Gruenbaum's about to set a new mark! He's passing the German. Thirty-seven! Thirty-seven people passed on a single bridge! A new Olympic record!

But okay, I've got to focus. And no running allowed. If you run and they catch you, you're disqualified.

Here's a family. Like ours. A boy and his sister. She looks about four years older than him, too, just like with us. I wonder if she tells him to stop acting like a baby all the time too. Doesn't matter, they're tossing bits of bread out to the seagulls.

Seven, eight, nine, ten.

Can't get distracted in the middle. Not by that boat sliding underneath. And not by the urge to turn back to see the old castle, even though it looks best from this spot. Because it's got to be the biggest castle anywhere. I swear, sometimes its four steeples—especially the tallest one at the top of the cathedral—they disappear right into the clouds.

“Michael Gruenbaum!” my father screams at me. “What are you doing?” I pretend I didn't hear him. He won't be that mad; my father almost never gets that mad. Another reason he's the best dad anywhere.

Here's a couple, holding hands. Piece of cake.

Eleven, twelve.

Four more and it's a record.

A woman walking her dog.

Thirteen.

Two men arguing in German. Walking fast, as if they know, as if they were sent here to discourage our nation's best bet. But it won't be so easy, gentlemen. My legs might be short, but my feet are quick.

Fourteen, fifteen!

I've tied my record.

Only there's just one problem. Oh no. There's no one left. And the end of the bridge, fast approaching, is barely fifty feet away.

Oh well, a tie is still impressive.

But what's this? Someone passing me!

A tall man, in shorts. Mother would say it's much too cold for shorts. And I have to agree, not that I'd say so. Gym shoes on his feet. Speeds past me. The bulge of a soccer ball in a bag on his back. I hear him huffing and see the sweat on his neck shining in the sunlight.

He must be a pro, or will be someday. Probably knows Antonin Puc personally. A striker if I had to guess.

But so what? Because I, Misha Gruenbaum (my parents only call me "Michael" when I'm in trouble), will one day represent Czechoslovakia in the Pass People on the Bridge event at the Olympics. It'll be a sport by 1948 or 1952, and by then I'll be in my prime.

So I begin to sprint, because here's a little known rule only the most dedicated competitors know: If someone else is running, you can run to pass them. That's allowed. Father won't be happy, me running like this in my clothes for synagogue. But so what? Someday, when the medal is hanging in our living room, when I'm a national hero, he'll understand it was all worth it.

Twenty feet to go. The man in the shorts turns his head, puzzled. Grins. Picks up his pace. But he's no match for a sprinter like Gruenbaum.

I break the finish line a moment before him!

The crowd goes wild!

The national anthem plays!

Sixteen!

A new record! I did it!!! Sixteen!!!

"Misha! Misha!"

I turn and hurry back to Father. Wipe the sweat off on the inside of my sleeves so he won't see. Try to get my breath back to normal.

"Look at the castle," I tell him. Because maybe that will distract him.

"Misha," he says, concerned. "You're only eight years old. You can't just run off like that. I couldn't even—"

"Can we go?" I ask, pointing past his shoulder.

"Go? What are you—"

"To the castle." Father opens his mouth, like he's about to say something. "The first Sunday after you get back, from London. Please."

He puts his tallit bag under his left arm and turns toward the castle. It worked; I can see it in his eyes. He forgets about everything. Maybe even those stupid Nazis he and the rest of the adults won't shut up about.

“Sure,” he says quietly, still staring across the river. “I don’t see why not.” He puts his arm around me, and we continue along the bridge toward the synagogue. “So long as it doesn’t rain.”

My dad’s like that. Always worrying a bit. As if something is always about to go wrong. But if he knew about my new record, he’d realize that things are only going to get better. Because sometimes I can just tell.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eleanor Hayes:

People live in this new moment of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the spare time or they will get wide range of stress from both daily life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not only a robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity do you have when the spare time coming to a person of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative inside spending your spare time, often the book you have read is actually Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust.

James Adcock:

Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust can be one of your nice books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to place every word into pleasure arrangement in writing Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust but doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be one among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into new stage of crucial thinking.

Catherine Riddle:

Is it you who having spare time then spend it whole day by means of watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust can be the answer, oh how comes? The new book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your time by reading in this completely new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

Tanya Wilson:

As we know that book is essential thing to add our understanding for everything. By a book we can know everything we really wish for. A book is a set of written, printed, illustrated or perhaps blank sheet. Every year seemed to be exactly added. This guide Somewhere There Is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust was filled with regards to science. Spend your free time to add your knowledge about your research competence. Some people has different feel when they reading a new book. If you know how big good thing about a book, you can really feel enjoy to read a guide. In the modern era like at this point, many ways to get

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