

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit

By Judith Kerr

SUMMARY

Nine year-old Anna lives in Germany in 1933 with her mama, papa, and older brother, Max. Daughter of a celebrated Jewish author, she and her family are forced to flee Hitler's ascendancy to power. They escape to Switzerland, and then immigrate to France as Anna's father finds it increasingly difficult to find work. Anna's family learns to economize, and humorous, lighthearted, and sometimes poignant anecdotes describe the family's attempt to live normally as the refugee go to school in different countries, learn new languages, make new friends, and keep their positive outlook. This partly autobiographical book is based on Judith Kerr's own experiences, fleeing the Nazis in the 1930's.



When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit is an ALA notable book, a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, and a Horn Book Fanfare title.

POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

- Anna and Max rise to the challenge of being refugees in different but admirable ways. Anna cares deeply about her family and is always up for an adventure. Max is initially an indifferent student, but manages to buckle down and win the prix de excellence (the best student in the class prize) in Paris, an enormous achievement for a new immigrant.
- Mama and Papa are an impractical pair of intellectuals who struggle to adjust to their new reality as refugees. Their optimistic spirit is evident as Mama learns to cook and clean; and Papa, when discussing their situation, says thoughtfully, "It's an odd feeling... You live in a country all your life... Then suddenly, it's taken over by thugs and there you are, on your own in a strange place, with nothing." ... "Don't you mind?" asks Anna... "I find it very interesting."
- Onkle Julius is a kind and gentle soul, who refuses to believe the writing on the wall for Germany's Jews. His faith in man's existential goodness is an inspiration.

TOPICS TO DISCUSS

- Anna and Max have been playing with their friends, Vreneli and Franz, at the Zwirn cottage for weeks when some German children named Siegfried and Gudrun arrive and join them. After watching them play together, Siegfried' and Gudrun's mother, who supports the Nazis, forbids her children from playing with Anna and Max because they are Jewish. Vreneli and Franz then say they can't play with Max and Anna either!
- Do you think that it's fair that the children are not allowed to play together because of their parents' views? What would you do if you were Vreneli and Franz? What would you do if you were Siegfried and Gudrun?

-From the PJ Library – PJ Our Way

<https://pjourway.org/parent-guides/when-hitler-stole-the-pink-rabbit-parent-guide>

INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR JUDITH KERR (EXCERPT)

What was the scariest bit of the journey to France and then England – when you left Germany?

[Listen to me reading a part of When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit](#), that part was the most scary. But you see I wasn't scared enough. That's how I nearly gave us away. My brother understood more. I think children may get worried when they are told about something, but they mainly think about what's happening at the time, that's what I did anyway.

What was it like growing up in Germany and knowing that you were in danger?

Well, we weren't in danger until the last year we lived there. My brother was two and a half years older than me, and a lot more in touch with the world. I just wandered around and drew pictures. All sorts of terrible things happened of course – but I didn't know about them. Our parents didn't talk about it in our presence. We left Germany on the night before the elections when the Nazi party got voted in, on 5 March 1933. My mother told me later that at 8am on 6 March, Nazis came to our house for all our passports – so it was frightening but I wasn't aware of it. Our last winter in Berlin was great because we were beginning to be allowed to do things on our own, we were that much older. We went to the cinema on our own, the film was one of the first talkies (up until then the films were silent), Emil and the Detectives. I was nine years old.

Do you still think about your Pink Rabbit that you had to leave behind in Germany?

I remember it. It was quite old and wasn't very pink anymore. My brother Michael had played football with it and its eyes had come out so Heimpi embroidered new eyes on it. But when I first wrote the story down I didn't include the rabbit in it. I had told my husband Tom the story though and he said I had to put it in. He also gave the book the title When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit. It was a brilliant title but the publishers didn't like it at first. Even reviewers at the time said things like: "in spite of the strange title, it's a very good book". I think someone suggested it should be called The Famous Family.

Excerpted from an interview with The Guardian, February 18, 2016. Full interview:

<https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/feb/18/judith-kerr-interview-when-hitler-stole-pink-rabbit-mog>