

The Holocaust Historiography Project

Remarkable Nonsense about the Holocaust

He doesn't need facts, he has human soap

'I survived for a reason. We can't let people forget.'

- New memoir by Holocaust survivor reflects hope and humor amid despair and death

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It is a measure of Ben Hirsch's enduring, and perverse, humor that he can describe the Dachau concentration camp with a wry smile:[...]

[...]

Now Hirsch has written a poignant memoir, "Hearing a Different Drummer: A Holocaust Survivor's Search for Identity" (Mercer University Press, \$24.95). In his perversely funny way, "Drummer" delves into his life, psyche and dreams. It also attempts to trace the long roots of European anti-Semitism.

[...]

Hirsch's own season of despair began in November 1938, when he was 6. His father, Hermann Hirsch, a dentist, was arrested by the Gestapo during Kristallnacht, a pogrom against Jews.

His mother, Mathilda, decided to send young Ben and his four elder siblings to France, where they hid out for several years before escaping to America. She felt that Ben's younger brother Werner and sister Roselene were too small to travel.

The mother and her two young children were arrested in 1942.

Hirsch settled with a foster family in Atlanta. [...]

[...]

In 1970, Hirsch received a frantic call from a rabbi at Congregation Beth Jacob. A member of the synagogue had found four bars of soap from a Nazi death camp, each stamped "RJF," for "Rein Juden Fett" --- "Pure Jewish Fat." Hirsch helped arrange to inter the soap by the Greenwood Cemetery memorial.

Some historians deny that the Nazis made soap from their concentration camp victims. But Hirsch, when he was searching for information about his family members, read the diary of an uncle, a chemist who had survived the Holocaust. The uncle said he knew the Nazis made soap from people --- because he was forced to participate.

"Who in his right mind would talk about making soap from human remains if he didn't do it, in a memoir he never expected to be read?"

Hirsch worries that such horrors will be revised out of history.

"The attack on memory always bothers me. **You can't discount memories of people.**"

So he tries to spread the truth as he finds it.

[...]

"Yes, I believe in God," Hirsch says.

He winks.

"But sometimes, I feel that he owes me one."

[...]

Send all questions and comments to webmaster@historiography-project.org.