

mistake, given its colourful cover and dimensions the size of a square of origami paper. But then you notice that one of the cut-outs is a daily horse-racing form. As you soon see, this is a tale for adults.

Author Bossin is probably better known as cofounder, with Marie-Lynn Hammond, of the renowned Canadian folk group Stringband. Mixing family history—"with varying degrees of veracity"—and a 16th-century Jewish folk tale, Bossin creates a touching and humorous story of family relationships.

One extremely snowy winter evening in 1960, the narrator and his parents attend the annual family Chanukah celebration at his Uncle Avram's house in Toronto's celebrated Forest Hill. While waiting for the snow plow to come, the narrator's Uncle Davy tells the story of how his father, Zussman, met the famous Chasidic rabbi, the Baal Shem Tov, the Besht. On this night of miracles, he tells a

story of a miraculous mitzvah wrought through simple error.

Bossin reimagines the old Jewish folk tale in which a man, misunderstanding the rabbi's teachings, leaves loaves of challah in the Ark as an offering. The challah is discovered by the synagogue's hungry shammas, a minor synagogue official, who believes the loaves have been left by God in answer to his prayers. In Latkes, the challah is replaced by a delicious plate of—you guessed it—latkes. Zussman, the little shul's baal tefila (prayer leader), uncovers the meaning of this strange transaction with the help of the Besht who miraculously appears in their little shul.

Uncle Davy—"Davy the Punk"—has spent his life on the wrong side of the law, although "he boasted a lifelong, unblemished record of acquittals." Naturally, Davy's line of employment is a disappointment to his "old-world" father whose beatings and fights with Davy were legendary,

causing Davy to leave home at nineteen. Zussman was a man who was not well liked, "but he was well respected." Yet, this same Uncle Davy, who usually sits at family gatherings "invariably hidden behind a racing form," is the one to share this moving tale. This in itself is a little miracle. Forgiveness can come in many forms; the narrator likes to think "that Davy's story that snowy night was itself a reconciliation."

Relationships are at the heart of both these books—between young and old, family and friend, book and reader. Abby's Birds and Latkes have a bittersweet quality that is extremely satisfying; they celebrate the human spirit without sentimentalizing its joys or sensationalizing its hazards. In a pleasant twist, both books offer some reader participation as well. Remove the cover from Abby's Birds and you'll find origami instructions for paper cranes, and at the end of Latkes is Mima Malka's latke recipe. Enjoy!♦

## GOOD-BYE MARIANNE: A STORY OF GROWING UP IN NAZI GERMANY

Irene Watts. Illustrated by Kathryn Shoemaker. Tundra Books, Toronto, 2008. 128 pages.

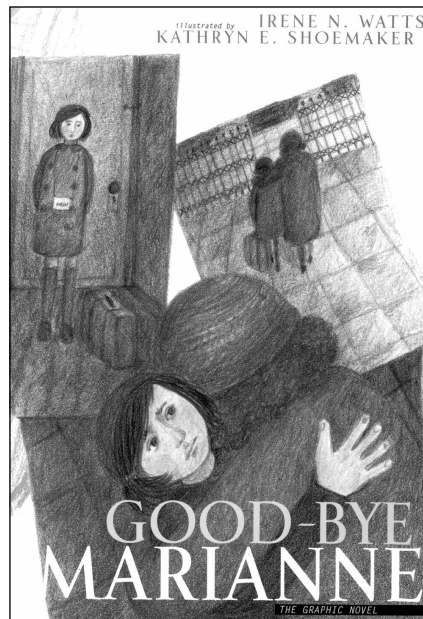
Reviewed by Adrienne Fitch

**A**s the child of a Holocaust survivor, I have been trying to grasp my father's painful, horrific past for as long as I can remember.

Though aware he survived the war from age nine to fifteen, I always found it difficult to imagine him as anything other than an adult.

Even more difficult to fathom were his accounts of starvation, torture and murder. He spoke of being shot, of losing his humanity, of being reduced to an animal whose only desire was to consume

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a loaf of bread and then die.

It's not that I didn't believe him. But in my sheltered experience, I

found it difficult to process the atrocities he experienced and witnessed. His story was so shocking, so appalling. I could only view it with detachment, as though it were a horror film.

One part of my father's story, however, has always made me cry.

His family, evacuated from the Koziencier ghetto, were en route to Treblinka. My grandfather, aware of what was coming, gathered his children around him, blessed each one and apologized for no longer being able to fulfill his obligations as a father. Then he began throwing them out the train window.

This heartbreaking theme—a parent telling her child she can no longer keep her safe—is what makes *Good-bye Marianne* so moving.

Written by Vancouver author Irene Watts and illustrated by Kathryn Shoemaker, *Good-bye Marianne* was first published in 1998 as a children's novel. The book was recently re-issued in graphic novel (comic book) format. Pencil drawings, speech balloons and sound effects make the story

# The OUTLOOK on Books

more accessible to young children without sacrificing its powerful message.

Set in 1938 Berlin the week after *Kristallnacht*, *Good-bye Marianne* portrays life as a German Jew during the Nazi era, from the viewpoint of 11-year-old Marianne Kohn.

Expelled from school, worried about her missing father and afraid to tell people her last name, Marianne begins discovering what she can no longer take for granted—the goodwill of a neighbour, the loyalty of a friend, the freedom to walk outside unmolested.

Their world growing ever more dangerous, Marianne and her mother struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy—playing dominoes at night, buying birthday gifts, eating her father's favourite supper "because it's important for us to remember."

But after the Gestapo trash their apartment, they realize things can never be normal. Marianne can no longer take for granted the most basic assumption of childhood—that her parents will always protect her.

She ends up joining thousands of other Jewish children escaping to Britain via the *Kindertransporte*, a prewar rescue mission. Her fate in England, and the fate of her parents, are left untold.

I asked my two daughters to read the book and write down their impressions. "This girl, Marianne Kohn, she was strong," writes Julia, nine. "She was angry about what being a Jew put her through but she didn't cry or whine. She didn't want to change. She shouldn't have to .... She



moved on and took the step to a new life ... I am so grateful to be born in a time where I have the right to be who I am."

Emily, thirteen, wrote: "What strikes me is how questions I would take for granted have to be taken seriously here. Questions like, 'You will never leave me on my own,' or 'We can still be friends.' How many questions like that do we ask each other that we already know the answers to? Just needing reassurance? In *Good-bye Marianne*, that assurance doesn't come, and I had to do a few double-takes."

My own impressions of the book were influenced by my father's story. Because I can only imagine him as an adult, I appreciated the details depicting Marianne as a kid—worried about a math test, having a messy room, making friends because you like the same book.

Just like my father's train story, the farewell scenes between Marianne and her mother had me sobbing. "You are going to a better, safer life," writes Mrs. Kohn in a letter. "Here there might be no life at all. I wish there had been more time. Someone else will

lengthen your clothes, buy you new shoes, brush your hair ..."

At some point in her journey, Marianne reflects that she will never tell anyone what happened to her, that no one would ever believe it.

Certainly, much of what happened during the Holocaust is inconceivable, the stuff of horror films. The documented evidence in museums, photographs, newsreel footage, records and eyewitness accounts serve an important purpose. We must never forget.

*Good-bye Marianne* is very believable, and very accessible, as a way of teaching children about the Holocaust. No matter how old we are, we can all relate to the universal value of keeping children safe. Even if it means doing the unthinkable—sending them away. ♦

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### Corrections

In Tony Wohlfarth's review of the film *The World Was Ours* in our July/August issue (p. 18), there was a phrase, "...Jewish Vilna, Lithuania (now Poland)..." Vilna (now Vilnius), is now the capital of Lithuania, and is not in Poland. Our apologies for not catching this error.

In Ferdinand Knobloch's article, "One Sunny Sunday in Prague," in our Sept./Oct. issue, we accidentally omitted the following acknowledgement: "The author wishes to express appreciation to Richard Marcuse for his assistance in preparing this essay for publication." Our apologies for this omission.

—The Editors