

The Missing

The True Story of
My Family in World War II

For Emma, Elsie and Emile.
In memory of my father's
"missing" uncles and aunts:
Oscar (Jeschie) and Rachel, Martin,
Stella and Bernard, Bella, Willi and Genia.

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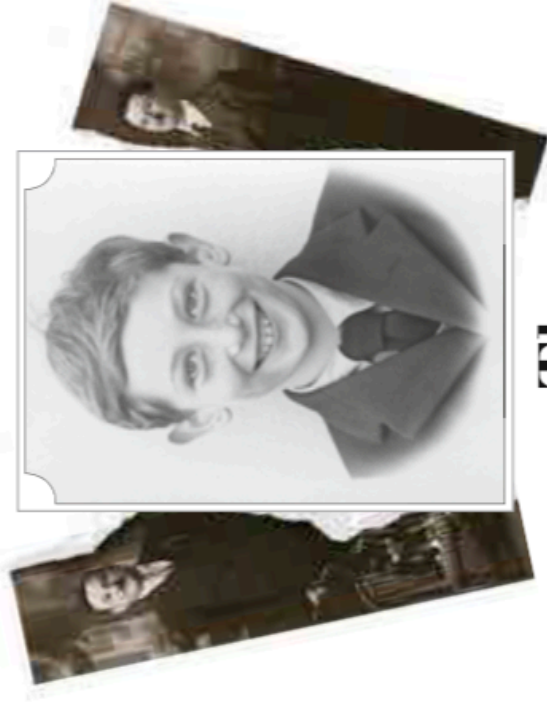
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Michael Rosen



The Missing

The True Story of
My Family in World War II



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Not Just For Them

This is about France.

This is about Germany.

This is about Jews.

This is not about France.

This is not about Germany.

This is not about Jews.

This story is about things that happened to my family a long time ago, back when photos and films were in black and white. But when I think about it, my relatives were refugees – a lot like the people you may have seen on the news recently.

Because of the events of the Second World War, they were forced to run: to flee and hide. When I turn on the TV now, eighty years later, I see thousands of families that have been forced to run from new wars, driven into hiding and sometimes losing their lives.

So I hope this book becomes part of a bigger conversation about the refugee crisis. About how to find fair and decent ways of helping people like my relatives.

Michael Rosen

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Me aged ten, in Pinner

I grew up in a peaceful sort of a place called Pinner, to the north of London - full of people who caught the train to the centre of town in the morning and only came back in the evening.

My family lived in a flat over a shop: me, my mother Connie, my father Harold and my brother Brian. In the evenings, I played in a stony alleyway at the back of the shop, and every day I walked across the Memorial Park to school with my friend "Harrybo". (His real name was Brian Harrison, but we all called him that.) He and I used to talk about wild animals, insects, the books we had read - and radios. He was mad keen on old radios: he liked to take them apart and put them back together.

Sometimes grown-ups talked about "The War", and they always meant the Second World War. At the time, it seemed to me that The War only existed in the stories they told. I knew a bomb had landed in a park near where we lived.

One bomb. That was it.

But quite a few of our dads had been in the army. My dad was American, so he had been in the United States Army. He still had some of his uniform and kit: a cooking pan, a special kind of spade called an “entrenching tool” and little brass badges saying **US ARMY**. I loved listening to his stories about his time as a soldier and I loved the way he put on an American accent when he told them.

Dad wasn’t ever in a battle. He was sent out to Berlin and told to write reports on the army’s time there, so he went round the different bases to find out what was going on. One colonel thought that my dad had come to spy on him – to see if he was doing anything he shouldn’t have been.

“Do you like mushrooms?” asked the colonel.

“I do and I don’t,” said Dad.

“I can give you as many as you want,” came

the reply, and he took my dad down into the old bomb shelters under the streets ... where he had built a mushroom farm. He was using the mushrooms as a bribe, so that Dad wouldn’t put anything about it in his report.

“Thousands of mushrooms!” my dad would say. “Right there, in the middle of a bombed-out city. People were starving, living in cellars, under the rubble – and he was growing mushrooms!”

I would imagine that.

Another time, a friend of my dad’s wanted to know what had happened to a colleague who had worked in the Berlin Natural History Museum. It was midwinter, deep snow everywhere, but my dad still set out to find the museum. As he drew nearer to where it should have been, he could see ruined bits of building sticking up out of the snow – and in between the broken towers, there was the skeleton of a giant dinosaur.

I would imagine that too.

There was nothing like that round our way. Though one day, a boy came to school and said that he had found an old bomb shelter in the Memorial Park. So when it was getting dark, my friends and I went and levered off the metal cover, then climbed down the ladder into the shelter.

There were beds still with blankets on them and bits of rubbish on the floor. We got scared standing there in the dark and climbed out – but I think maybe we didn't put the metal cover back properly because, not long afterwards, the park wardens put earth over the top of it.

I started to wonder who had been down there and what it had really been like in Pinner during The War.

There were dinosaur skeletons standing there in the middle of nowhere. Great bones and skulls rising up out of the snow amongst heaps of broken brick and broken glass.

"I'll never forget the sight of those dinosaur skeletons," my dad said.

I've never forgotten them either – though I never saw them.

From **Skeletons**

The Absentees

There are gaps,
there are blanks,
in the house
of my life;
there's a face,
nothing more,
something gone
from my life.

She was here,
he was there,
in the rooms
of my life;
there's a place
for them both
in the words
of my life.

Written for Holocaust Memorial Day, 2018