

Dedication

For my cousins, Cesia and Annette Insdorf, and the Insdorf family.

This book is dedicated to the memory of all those who have suffered the horrors of prejudice, specifically antisemitism. May all of those who died be remembered. May the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust be remembered. May the survivors be honored. May the rescuers and liberators who risked life and limb to help the victimized be thanked. A special thank-you goes out to Dr. Som Pourfarzaneh and the Starr King School for the Ministry who inspired the creation of this story.

How To Use This Book

This book highlights historical events that have affected the Jewish people's survival, and includes a brief history of antisemitism. The events are presented in chronological order. Jewish culture is also discussed and celebrated. This book is written for youths ages 11 and above.

Parents are encouraged to read this book with their children, and to talk about the issues and events presented, particularly the Holocaust. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, students in the sixth grade and above can empathize and begin to learn about the Holocaust and the reasons that it occurred. (USHMM 2023) Survivors' personal experiences of the Holocaust can begin to be comprehended. (USHMM 2023) Parents are invited to help their children process the emotions that surface. Sensitivity has been exercised to contextualize the Holocaust, to frame each Jewish person as an individual, and to avoid broad generalizations. I was introduced to the PBS series "Shoah" in the sixth grade, and to live survivor testimony in the eighth grade. (Lanzmann 1985) Age appropriateness is difficult to gauge and can be decided upon depending on the individual. Parents are asked to preview the material presented with this in mind.

The words in boldface type are defined in the glossary at the end of the book to enhance learning. Reflection questions are provided to assess reading comprehension and to stimulate critical thinking. A bibliography is included and can be consulted if further information is desired.

Introduction

Olivia lives with her father in upstate New York. She loves the changing of the seasons. She cherishes winter the most, especially when the snow makes her backyard into a winter wonderland. She enjoys seeing her neighbor's shiny **Hanukkah** menorah, with its eight flickering candles reflecting a warm golden glow on the newly fallen snow. However, Olivia's father does not like Jewish people or their customs. He encourages his daughter instead to marvel at her own beautiful Christmas tree. Olivia's father says that he doesn't like Jewish people because they do not believe in Jesus the way that he does, and they don't celebrate Christ's birth. This makes Olivia curious and she asks him many questions pertaining to this. His answers make her think, at first, that Jews are too different to be liked. But, she still believes deep down that Jews are people too, and that they are deserving of love just like everyone else. Each Jew is an individual and is special, like her.



Chapter 1: Trouble at School

One day on the playground at school, Olivia sees a bunch of kids playing with Abraham's **yamulke**, a Jewish prayer cap. They are playing "Keep Away," and they ignore Abraham's cries. Olivia feels afraid and decides that it is too dangerous for her to intervene and stop the bullies from humiliating Abraham. She is frightened that the bullies will come after her. She remembers what her father told her about Jewish people, but she feels that prejudice against all Jews is wrong. Olivia likes everyone and she feels in her heart that what the kids are doing is wrong. However, she does nothing to help her Jewish classmate. "What can I do?" she asks herself. "I am only one person."



The next day, Olivia approaches Abraham and apologizes for not helping him get away from the bullies. She tells Abraham what her father said about the Jews and she asks him who

the Jewish people are. Abraham sets his backpack down and opens it. He carefully removes a pair of magical chocolate brown shoes. He tells Olivia that if she puts them on, then Abraham and she could travel through time to learn who the Jewish people are. Olivia's face lights up with excitement as she slips on the magic shoes. In an instant, they are off flying through the galaxy.

Chapter 2: Moses

Olivia and Abraham land in Biblical times when it is said that Moses, leader of the Israelites, was given the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Abraham explains that these commandments are holy to Jews *and* Christians. In fact, many Jewish teachings are included in the Old Testament and are central to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity! Olivia is amazed that she has so much in common with the Jewish people.



She is also delighted when Abraham tells her that many laws in Judaism have to do with food and how to keep it holy. These laws are listed in the Talmud, the book of Jewish law.

Talking about food makes Olivia hungry, so Abraham thinks that this next stop will be welcomed.

Chapter 3: Culinary Delights

Abraham and Olivia are whisked off to a Jewish bakery. Jewish people love to eat and share food, just like people in many cultures. A lot of Jewish life is focused on special holiday foods and family gatherings around the table. Olivia's mouth waters as she looks at each pastry. The bakery posts a list of the culinary delights with descriptions of each one in their shop. (It is included on the next pages.)

At holiday time, certain foods are eaten that symbolize events that have affected the Jewish people's history. For instance, matzah cake represents the **unleavened bread** that Jews made after they were released from Egyptian slavery during Biblical times.

After looking at the bakery's list, Olivia asks for a jelly-filled doughnut that celebrates Hanukkah, the holiday she watches her neighbors celebrate. Abraham and his Dad tell her that food can unite people across cultural boundaries, opening hearts as they fill the tummy.



Jewish Bakery Items

Matzah Cake – A white cake made from matzah, unleavened bread that is eaten on Passover.

This is the holiday that celebrates the Jews' liberation from Egyptian slavery. Matzah is made of flour and water, and can be made into a fine cake flour.

Babka - A yeasty sweet bread that is filled with cinnamon, chocolate, or jam, and is braided then baked. It is a comfort food originally made in Poland and the Ukraine. The braid is reminiscent of grandmothers' skirts. (Wikipedia 2023)

Braided Challah – A yeasty egg bread that is eaten on Jewish holidays, like Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest.

Round Challah – A yeasty egg bread that is eaten to celebrate a healthy and happy New Year on the holiday called Rosh Hashanah. The challah is round to symbolize a complete New Year. Honey is usually eaten on the challah to represent a sweet New Year.

Bagel – A bread that is shaped like a ring that originated in Poland. Traditionally, the dough is boiled and then baked. Bagels can be sliced down the middle and toasted, and can be enjoyed with cream cheese and jelly.

Black and White Cookie - A celebrated traditional cookie with one half decorated with black icing and the other half decorated with white icing. It is a delicious cookie that is part of Jewish Eastern European cuisine.

Jelly Doughnut – A sumptuous treat that is made of dough that is fried and filled with frosting, cream, or fruit jelly. It is a traditional food of Hanukkah, which celebrates the miracle that allowed the Jews to rebuild the Second Temple during the second century B.C. after

it had been destroyed. The miracle is that the oil in the temple's lamp lasted for eight nights, instead of one.

Mandelbrot – A crunchy almond cookie that is very similar to the dry biscotti cookie, and is popular among Eastern European Jews.

Bialy – A chewy baked roll that has a dip in the middle instead of a hole like its cousin, the bagel. It is yummy with cream cheese and originates from Poland.

Rugelach – A cream cheese dough crescent roll traditionally eaten at Hanukkah. It can be filled with cinnamon, chocolate, or fruit.

Hamentaschen – A triangular crunchy cookie with jam or poppy seed paste in the middle that resembles the triangular hat or pocket of Haman, the villain in the story of Purim. Purim celebrates the Biblical defeat of Haman, and the salvation of the Jewish people from death at his hands.

Macaroon – A delicious coconut ball cookie that is moist in the center. It is a staple food at Passover.

Jelly Cookie – A favorite cookie with a sticky jelly center that is often found in Jewish bakeries.

Mandel – A crouton used in soup instead of oyster crackers. It is traditionally made from palm oil and flour.

Boureka – A Middle Eastern stuffed pastry that resembles a turnover made from puff pastry or filo dough. It can be filled with fruit, cheese, potato, meat, or nuts.

Chapter 4: Jesus' Crucifixion

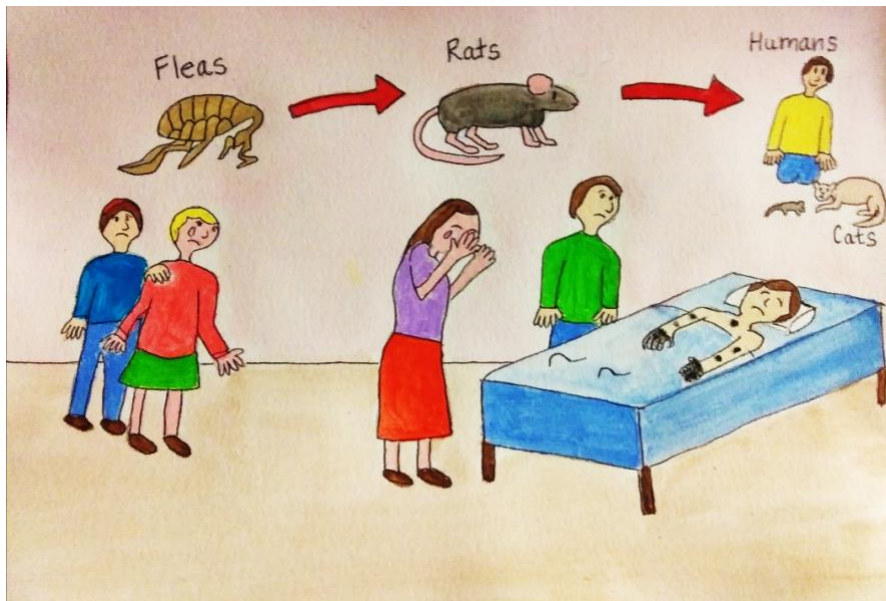
Olivia wonders what Jews thought of Jesus, and why that bothered her Dad. Abraham tells her that Jesus was a Jewish teacher who became central to Christianity following his death. He had many Jewish followers during his life. After the Romans crucified Jesus, they wrongly blamed the Jews for causing it. This is the **deicide myth**. It is written in the New Testament that the Jews caused Jesus' death, which led to many years of hatred and discrimination against the Jews. This is called **antisemitism**. In 1965, the Catholic Church wrote the **Nostra Aetate**, which absolved all Jews from blame for Jesus' death. In addition, "[f]or the first time in history [the] Nostra Aetate called for Catholics and Jews to engage in friendly dialogue . . . to better understand each other's faith." (ADL 2017) Even so, many people still believe that the Jews are to blame. "We must do what we can to stand up for and defend Jewish people," Abraham explains. "We are people too and don't deserve to be victimized." Olivia agrees. She feels angry that the Jews are being accused of something they didn't do.

Olivia asks if the Jews pray to Jesus like she does. Abraham says that many Jews don't pray to Jesus or believe that Jesus is the Messiah, because he does not fit the description of the Jewish Messiah in the holy scriptures. (Levine 2023) There is only one God in Judaism, so Jesus cannot be the Lord. Only the Father can be. Olivia wonders aloud why believing in a different way is so bad. After all, it is the differences among people that make us so special and interesting, she thought. It would be boring if we all did the same things, had the same culture and language, and had the same beliefs.

Chapter 5: The Bubonic Plague

The next stop on the Magic Shoes route lands Abraham and Olivia in the 14th century. Abraham warns her that this stop is sad and a little bit scary. This was the time when the notorious Black Death, also known as the Bubonic Plague, made people all over the world very sick. Fleas from rats that traveled on ships caused the disease, and most victims died shortly after contracting the illness.

Because people were afraid and were looking for someone to blame for the spread of the Black Death, Jews were targeted. Christianity was the accepted faith, and customs that were different were seen as suspicious. (Dinkins 2023) Jews also seemed to be more immune to the disease, possibly because they had better ways of staying safe and clean. (Throp 2018). Jews were said to have poisoned the wells of Europe with the bacteria that caused the Bubonic Plague. Of course, that was a lie. It was a terrible time for the Jewish people. Many Jews were killed in **pogroms**. Antisemitism was rampant. In fact, the years 1348-1349 saw the worst massacre of Jews in history before the Holocaust. (Winkler 2023) Olivia cries and hugs Abraham.



Chapter 6: The Holocaust

Abraham tells Olivia that this is the most frightening of all the stops, but that it is very important to learn about. It was a prominent event in the history of the Jewish people and evolved from hundreds of years of antisemitism. The Holocaust was the **genocide** of six million Jews that occurred between 1933 and 1945. The Nazi party, led by Adolph Hitler, wanted to create a new race of people called Aryans. Judaism was no longer only a religion, but became a “race” in Nazi **ideology**. The Jewish “race” was too different in custom and appearance, so Hitler’s armies killed two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish population. (USHMM 2023) Five million other people who didn’t fit the description of the Aryan race were also killed.

Concentration camps, which were either forced labor camps or death camps, were built to house these people before they died. People had to travel in crowded cattle train cars to the camps with little or no sustenance, and no fresh air for days. Some people died on the trains. At the camps, people were starved and made to work, unless they were killed immediately upon entering the camps. Their heads were shaved, and they were made to wear striped garments. Stars of David were sewn onto the clothes of Jews and everyone was tattooed with a number. People slept on hard wooden planks without pillows or blankets to keep them comfortable. They were treated very badly and many died from typhus, an infection caused by lice, among other diseases. The Jews were systematically killed because they were different. This was the worst genocide of the Jews in history.



Olivia wonders why Hitler and the Nazis hated the Jews so much. It makes her very angry and upset. Abraham explains that for centuries, Jews were targeted because they didn't have the same beliefs as the society's dominant religion, Christianity. Also, Hitler was humiliated by Germany's defeat in World War I and wrongly blamed the Jews for it. (Becky 2023) Germany was embarrassed because it was punished and made to pay **reparations** to other countries for causing World War I. In addition, Hitler wrongly blamed the Jews for the economic depression in Germany caused by America's **Great Depression**. (WJC 2023) The Great Depression made many people poor and hungry.

Were there people who felt as Olivia did, that the treatment of Jewish people was bad? Yes! Abraham tells Olivia that there were some people who risked their lives to hide Jews in their homes to protect them from the Nazis. Others created false passports and attained visas for Jewish people so that they could leave the country. Some, like Irena Sendler, hid Jewish children

in convents or orphanages, keeping track of where the children went so that they could be reunited with their families after the war. (Harrison 2009) Oskar Schindler, a Nazi himself, saved many Jews by protecting them and paying other Nazis for them. He disagreed with the Nazis' killing of the Jews. (USHMM 2023)



Thank God for these people, Olivia thought. If she was alive during those times, she felt that she would have helped Jews escape death at the hands of the Nazis. She wants to tell her Dad all about what she has learned about the Jewish people so that he will stop disliking Jews. Maybe he would begin to see them the way she does. Jews are people very much like her.

Chapter 7: Anne Frank

The next stop takes Olivia and Abraham to the attic in the Netherlands where the Jewish Anne Frank and her family, along with the Van Pels and Dr. Fritz Pfeffer, hid during the Holocaust with the help of friends. Abraham tells Olivia about the famous diary that Anne kept there. Anne was thirteen years old when she went into hiding in 1942. In her diary, she talked about what life in the Secret Annex was like. The families had to stay quiet night and day. A friend went grocery shopping for them, and they had to ration their food. Life was difficult. Anne went through the growing pains and joys that teenagers face, under exceptional circumstances.

Sadly, after two years of hiding, Anne Frank and her family and friends were arrested. Anne, her sister Margot, and her mother Edith all died in the concentration camps, as did the Van Pels and Dr. Pfeffer. After the war, Anne's father, Otto, published her diary. People from all over the world could relate to her childhood innocence, her *joie de vivre*, and her growing pains. They learned about the toll that antisemitism took on her and the families. Many are inspired by her bravery. (The Anne Frank House 2023). Abraham's favorite part of her diary was this: Anne said, "Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart." (Brainy Quotes 2023). "Such an optimistic vision of human beings is something to be treasured and strived for," Abraham said. Olivia tells Abraham that she wants to read Anne Frank's diary so that she can better understand what she went through. After all, Olivia is almost Anne's age. Olivia counts her blessings, just like Anne.

Chapter 8: Mitzvot

Abraham explains to Olivia that what people did to help the Jews was a **mitzvah**. Similarly, Jews believe in using their God-given free will to make the world a better place by doing

mitzvot themselves. It is believed that doing mitzvot, which are good deeds, will bring the Jewish people closer to God and help them in the afterlife. It is the responsibility of the Jews to perform good deeds because that is what they promised God when they received the Ten Commandments. (BBC 2023) Olivia also loves to do good deeds because she feels great when she helps out. Christianity teaches people to do good deeds, she observes.

There are many ways of doing mitzvot. People can raise money and give it to a charity. The money is called **tzedakah**. In addition, one can plant a tree, volunteer to help the elderly in a nursing home, or visit the sick. Olivia loves this idea and wants to help Abraham perform a mitzvah. She decides to plant a tree in honor of Abraham in Israel. She sends her tzedakah in an envelope to the Jewish National Fund, an organization that plants trees for donors, like Olivia.

She asks why Israel is so important to the Jewish people. Olivia and Abraham are whisked away to visit the Holy Land, the State of Israel.

Chapter 9: Israel

Abraham and Olivia land in Israel. Abraham explains that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine was meant to make a safe homeland for Jews to live in after the Holocaust. Since Jews had been killed throughout history, and since it was unsafe for Jewish Holocaust survivors to immigrate to antisemitic European countries, Israel was established in 1948. Many countries that Jewish families considered to be home had very strict immigration policies, so many Jews could not return home. The Jews needed a new home. So, by returning to the God-given Promised Land of their ancestors, the Jews believed that they would be accepted, safe, and free of the terrors of antisemitism. That is why Israel is so important. (USHMM 2023).

Unfortunately, the creation of Israel **displaced** many Palestinians who already lived on that land. The desperation for a safe place to call home began a series of attacks and wars between Israelis and Palestinians that, sadly, continue to this day.

Chapter 10: Olivia Takes a Stand

When Olivia and Abraham are returned to the school yard, time magically returns to when the bullies were playing “Keep Away” with Abraham’s yarmulke. Olivia jumps up and catches the yarmulke. She returns it to Abraham, and tells the bullies to leave her friend alone. “How would you like it if someone teased you because you are different?” The bullies leave, grumbling to themselves. Olivia feels great that she spoke up and made a difference. She approaches her teacher that day to ask if she can give a presentation on antisemitism, including a **synopsis** of what she learned about the Jewish people. Her teacher is delighted and says, “Yes please.” Olivia feels empowered, and Abraham is proud of her. On the white board, Olivia writes “Prejudice hurts everyone.”

She explains that prejudice can lead to hatred, and that it is dangerous when it is used to oppress people. Discrimination can happen to anyone. Anyone can become the victim of prejudice and hatred for being seen as different. She focuses her talk on the Jewish people and draws a timeline on the board depicting the events that she learned about that led up to the Holocaust. She explains that Jewish people are people just like everyone else, and that they have been treated unfairly throughout history. She says that it is time for antisemitism to come to an end, and for all people to treat each other with respect. Differences should be celebrated, not feared. Most of all, she says, “Acceptance begins with each one of us.” It is important to educate oneself about others instead of making fun of them or being afraid. “Even one person can make a

difference and change the world for the better,” Olivia says. She is grateful to Abraham and the magic shoes for all that she has learned.



Chapter 11: Olivia's Dad Learns an Important Lesson

After Olivia tells her Dad all about the Jewish people, she asks if they can meet their Jewish neighbor and invite him for a visit. Olivia's Dad says yes! She and her Dad walk to their neighbor's house and invite him over. He agrees. Once they begin to chat, Olivia's Dad realizes how much they have in common. He still disagrees with his neighbor's Jewish beliefs, but he can

feel the hatred melt away. They become friends. They invite their new friend over for Christmas, and their neighbor invites them over for the eighth night of Hanukkah!



Afterword:

Why have the Jewish People Been Historically **Scapegoated**?

One of the main reasons that Jews have been scapegoated throughout the centuries is the deicide myth. Intense hatred towards the Jews developed the world over. Jews are still blamed for the death of Jesus to this day, despite the Nostra Aetate. Hopefully, through education of the young, including the debunking of myths and stereotypes, the Jewish people will be better understood. I wrote this book in the hopes that prejudice will not have the chance to take hold of young minds and hearts, and maybe change the adolescent and adult minds that are already prejudiced.

Another reason points to something that Hitler believed. It may be that when Hitler scapegoated the Jews, he did so because he was against the Jewish teaching to do **tikkun olam**. Tikkun olam is demonstrated by people doing mitzvahs for others. Hitler wanted to rid the world of morality. He states, “ ‘conscience is a Jewish invention . . . I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience, morality . . . We will train young people before whom the whole world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence, imperious, relentless, [and] cruel.’ ” (Spokoiny 2020) This is why he created the Hitler Youth program, and championed the cruelty of the Nazis.

Perhaps others throughout the ages felt the same way regarding Jewish morality. Jesus was a very prominent Jew who became famous for performing mitzvot for people. One could argue that perhaps Pontius Pilate felt that Jesus was a threat to his regime because of it.

Glossary

Antisemitism – Prejudice against and hatred of the Jewish people. (Becky 2023)

Deicide myth – The myth that the Jews caused Jesus' crucifixion. It literally means "death of a god." Jesus is seen as the Lord by many people.

Displaced – Uprooting someone from their home.

Genocide – The mass killing of people of a certain ethnicity, race, or religion in an attempt to eliminate them.

The Great Depression – The stock market crash of 1929 which made many people very poor. That is because many of these people put their money in the stock market and lost it when their money lost its value.

Hanukkah – A December holiday that celebrates the rededication of the Second Temple in ancient times. It commemorates the miracle of the temple's oil lasting for eight nights instead of one, allowing the rebuilding of the temple to occur. A menorah is used to symbolize these eight nights. A menorah is a candelabra consisting of nine candle holders. The extra candle is used to light all of the others.

Ideology – Ideas of a political party or culture, or a set of beliefs.

Joie de vivre – The joy of living.

Mitzvah – A good deed that people do for others. Mitzvot is the plural form of mitzvah.

Nostra Aetate – An edict written in 1965 by the Catholic Church that said that the Jewish people are not to blame for Jesus' crucifixion.

Pogroms – Organized killings of people of a particular ethnicity, race, or religion.

Reparations – The making of amends after someone has wronged someone else, sometimes in the form of money, rights, or land.

Scapegoat – Someone or a group of people wrongly blamed for another's wrongdoing or for a historical event.

Synopsis – A summary.

Tikkun olam – A Jewish belief in the responsibility of people to repair the world, and create just and sustainable communities that benefit everyone.

Tzedakah – Charity given to people in need, often in the form of money.

Unleavened bread – Bread that does not have yeast and doesn't rise, like matzah.

Yarmulke – A Jewish prayer cap that is worn by some Jewish people at all times, and by others only on Jewish holidays or for synagogue services. It is an acknowledgement of one's respect for God.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important that we learn about the deicide myth?
2. What is the Nostra Aetate?
3. What can happen as a result of antisemitism?
4. What was the well-poisoning myth, and what happened as a result of people believing it?
5. What events led up to the Holocaust?
6. Could the Holocaust have been prevented?
7. How can we prevent future genocides from happening?
8. Can we as individuals make a positive difference in the world? How?
9. Can we prevent antisemitism from spreading? How?
10. What can you do about genocides that are happening right now?
11. To what time and place would you go if you were wearing the magic shoes? Why?

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