



German Boy: A Child in War

By Wolfgang W. E. Samuel

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“I think *German Boy* has all the qualities of greatness. I love the book.” -- from the Foreword by Stephen Ambrose

As the Third Reich crumbled in 1945, scores of Germans scrambled to flee the advancing Russian troops. Among them was a little boy named Wolfgang Samuel, who left his home with his mother and sister and ended up in war-torn Strasbourg before being forced farther west into a disease-ridden refugee camp. *German Boy* is the vivid, true story of their fight for survival as the tables of power turned and, for reasons Wolfgang was too young to understand, his broken family suffered arbitrary arrest, rape, hunger, and constant fear.

Because his father was off fighting the war as a Luftwaffe officer, young Wolfgang was forced to become the head of his household, scavenging for provisions and scraps with which to feed his family. Despite his best efforts, his mother still found herself forced to do the unthinkable to survive, and her sacrifices became Wolfgang's worst nightmares. Somehow, with the resilience only children can muster, he maintained his youth and innocence in little ways—making friends with other young refugees, playing games with shrapnel, delighting in the planes flown by the Americans and the candies the GIs brought. In the end, the Samuels begin life anew in America, and Wolfgang eventually goes on to a thirty-year career in the U.S. Air Force.

Bringing fresh insight to the dark history of Nazi Germany and the horror left in its wake, *German Boy* records the valuable recollections of an innocent's incredible journey.

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German Boy: A Child in War By Wolfgang W. E. Samuel Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #199515 in Books
- Brand: Broadway Books
- Published on: 2001-10-16
- Released on: 2001-10-16
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.20" h x .90" w x 5.50" l, .77 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 448 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1945 Samuel, then 10 years old, fled his home in Sagan, Germany, with his mother and younger sister, escaping just ahead of the Russian army's arrival. The author's memoir vividly depicts what it was like to be a child refugee (confused and frightened) in postwar Germany, constantly searching for food and a haven. Since Hedy, the author's mother, had been planning to divorce his father (a Luftwaffe officer), she refused to join him, but instead took Samuel and his sister to stay with her parents in the small town of Strasburg, which shortly became a Russian-occupied zone. Although the author had earlier viewed his mother as self-centered and unloving, he describes how his image of her changed during their years on the run, when he saw her make heroic efforts to keep her children alive. Attractive to men and clever, Hedy used her wits and charm, exchanging sex for food for her children. Their situation improved after the author's father found them and managed their transportation to a barracks in the American zone. Samuel's parents divorced and, in 1950, Hedy married a U.S. Army sergeant. The author moved with them to the U.S., where he completed his education and began a 30-year career in the air force. He has produced an engrossing and powerful narrative. Maps. (Sept.)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Samuel was 10 years old when he, his mother, and younger sister fled the advancing Russian army in Germany in the final days of World War II. Describing the events many years later, Samuel still vividly remembers the disorientation, terror, hunger, and desperation that dogged their lives until 1951 when they arrived in the United States. The voice of a little boy develops into that of a young man as he writes of his mother's indomitable spirit and the degrading extremes she went to in order to obtain food and shelter for her children. The boy is ill-prepared to assume the crushing responsibility for keeping his family together and alive after the war years when he finds himself a refugee and outcast in his own country. There is a thread of hope, an appreciation for random kindness, and an ability to look beyond the depravity of humankind that pervades this brave and poignant memoir of a man who went on to serve 30 years in the U.S. Air Force and retired as a colonel.

Cynthia J. Rieben, W. T. Woodson High School, Fairfax, VA

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From Library Journal

Samuel's memoir recalls a boyhood in war-ravaged Germany during the final terrifying months of World War II and the hopelessness of the following years spent interned in inhumane and debilitating refugee camps. The son of a Luftwaffe officer and now himself a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, he recounts, with plainspoken and expressive first-person commentary, the danger and fear he faced fleeing from an advancing Russian army. What results is a gripping account of war, hunger, sickness, rape, and abuse-literally a race with death. Samuel vividly describes the refugee life of deprivation and humiliation, where sex is currency and hunger constant. He speaks emotionally of the love and strength of his brave mother ("my hero and friend") and her valiant and eventually successful struggle to protect and care for her family with the father away at war. This deeply emotional and moving memoir clearly illustrates that the military collapse of Nazi Germany was eclipsed by the greater tragedy of the German nation. Highly recommended for public and

academic libraries.

John E. Hodgkins, Yarmouth, MA

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From reader reviews:

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