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Book Review: I Remember Singing

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Aaron, Arielle A. *I Remember Singing*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4343-4648-3. \$23.95.

In *I Remember Singing*, North Carolina author Arielle A. Aaron, aka Joy Summerlin-Glunt, brings to us a heart-breaking and horrific story of one little boy, Hugo Schiller's, experience of the Nazi holocaust. The surviving man tells this brutally factual story with the gentleness and innocence of the child that was. Schiller, who now resides in South Carolina, recounts his story so 'people will not forget that it happened and that there were people who helped.'

The book begins with a preface to Mr. Schiller's story to introduce the readers to the situation in Germany in the 1930's; those responsible for creating it; a brief explanation of why they did so; and why they were succeeding at that point. Although an adult might find it too simple and brief, I think it is fitting as it is the preamble to a story told to both adults and children through a child's simple voice of innocence.

The story proper begins with Hugo sharing memories of his home, family, and boyhood in Grunsfeld, Germany. He had happy memories of his favorite foods, a loving family, childhood friendship, and learning to sing. However, in the midst of this time, subtle things began to happen in his town that as yet he did not understand. Why was he alone asked to pick up every single piece of paper on the school grounds one afternoon? Looking back at the innocence of the child he was, Hugo, the man, remarks,

"Because I was a child, I never dreamed there might be people in the world who did not love me."

Soon, the subtle events culminated in the open violence of Kristallnacht and state-sanctioned discrimination against Jews in Germany. His best friend Kilian was no longer allowed to be his friend. Eventually, Hugo was even barred from going to school. The atmosphere of fear and terror grew as Jews, their businesses and synagogues were openly attacked. Finally, in November 1938, dictator, Adolf Hitler ordered that all Jewish establishments be attacked and destroyed. In Grunsfeld, German soldiers came to their home, broke their furniture, and arrested Hugo's Father, a Medal of Honor winner for bravery in World War I, taking him to Dachau concentration camp for six weeks. Things were growing increasingly worse and his parents could not stop it or keep it from affecting him. Hugo stopped singing.

One morning at 5:00 a.m., the Nazis confiscated the Schillers' home ordering them to pack a suitcase and be ready to leave in one hour. They were sent to Camp De Gurs in France. This camp would eventually become a full-fledged concentration camp. Hugo was nine years old. He recounts his memories of life in the camp. They lived in wooden barracks, were usually cold and hungry, and disease was prevalent due to the ill conditions. Hugo recalled his first experiences with dead people, memories of other children in the camp, and singing for one of the women Vichy guards in order to get extra bread for his mother and aunt.

Then, one day, a light by the name of Alice Resch came into the camp. Alice was a Quaker Refugee Relief worker who convinced the guards to let her feed the children and eventually was able to take them away to a school in Aspet France. Alice, with the help of others including French villagers, made sure they were fed, clothed, and educated so they could survive. Hugo recounts his experiences in Aspet, shares letters from his family during that time, and recalls his memories of Alice, whom they referred to as the "Angel of Aspet." Alice would save them one more time by securing the children passage to the United States. Hugo saw his parents one last time before leaving to go live with his aunt and uncle in New York. His parents were taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau a few weeks later where they were murdered by the Nazis.

Hugo tells about growing up in and adapting to life in America and learning about what happened to his family in Europe. This part of his story fills one with mixed emotions—relief that Hugo, some of his family, and the other children with him at Aspet escaped the fate the Nazis had in store for them; joy that in the midst of all this, Hugo still had vestiges of the child exhibited by his practically empty suitcase heavy with the socks full of marbles he had won; and triumph that at least in America he was allowed to fight back when he was treated unjustly.

In the last sections of the book, Hugo Schiller, who today sings in Synagogue, explains why he personally believes it is an obligation for him to tell his story—whenever evil is not confronted, the “possibility exists for a Holocaust to [happen] again.” Those who survived, fought, resisted, or helped liberate, and who witnessed these events need to recount their stories so people will know the truth from those who experienced it. Through the telling, people can know it really happened and thereby remain ever-vigilant in hopes that we can prevent such a history from ever repeating itself.

Finally, Mr. Schiller explains his dedication to “doing good deeds” and “being responsible.”

“Because the world must be balanced, there must be more good deeds than there are evil deeds...”

He leaves the reader with a list of “things [they] can do to make [the] world a better place.” Included on the list are ‘treating other people the way you wish to be treated; being responsible for your own actions; using your mind to think; being courageous in the face of danger; staying strong and saying “no” when you should; and persevering.’ He also encourages readers to be always grateful for what they have and to develop their “own personal plan for making the world a better place.”

Arielle Aaron has not only presented Hugo Schiller’s amazing story of survival; but has also produced an excellent teaching tool for the classroom that can assist in lesson-planning and opening up discussions about history, society, government, politics, prejudice, the holocaust, morality and personal responsibility in a very real and personal way. In addition to Mr. Schiller’s story, the book includes pictures, maps, a vocabulary list, on-going memory projects, information about the Hugo Schiller Holocaust Resource Center, a Chronology of the Holocaust, a Glossary of Terms, and a Bibliography.

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Sorensen, Andrew A. *All to One Another: The University at Home and in the World*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008. ISBN 978-1-57003-773-3 \$19.95.

Dr. Andrew A Sorensen, president of the University of South Carolina from 2002-2008, retired just before the publication of this volume of speeches and articles. Through this assemblage of items, shines a man who cares deeply for the University of South Carolina and his adopted state of South Carolina. The common theme found in the collection is that of hope for the future through expanding the vision of the University to encompass the community, the state and the world beyond.