

A Survivor's Story

Norwegian Holocaust survivor Irene Levin Berman tells the untold story of Norway's Jews. **BY ANYA BRITZIUS**

During WWII in 1942, Nazi Germany invaded Norway, deporting nearly 40 percent of Norway's 2,000 Jews. While four-year-old Irene Levin Berman survived by escaping to Sweden with her family, seven members of her father's immediate family were among the 771 victims killed in concentration camps. In 2008, Berman wrote her story in the book "We Are Going to Pick Potatoes: Norway and the Holocaust, The Untold Story." It was first published in Norwegian and later translated into English. *Viking* spoke with the activist, translator and author about her story.

Q What sparked your idea to write a book?

A Several years ago, someone who was doing a collection of stories on Holocaust survivors living in the United States asked if I would write a chapter about myself and how I came to the United States. After I submitted the chapter, the publisher called and said my section was being cut because Norway was a very small country with very few Jews. I was devastated. I woke up and became an activist. I decided it was time to tell the story of Norway and the Holocaust, and I've never stopped.

Q Tell us about your memory at age four when your family escaped to Sweden.

A That's my first conscious memory. That day in the park, our housekeeper came to pick me up. She said we're going on vacation, and we're going to pick potatoes. I thought it sounded great. We escaped that same day, November 25, 1942. Most of the Jews were arrested a few hours later and taken to Auschwitz.

Q What was it like digging into your family history, knowing some of your family members did not survive?

A I didn't know much about the Holocaust myself. My parents didn't speak much about it to me. I started interviewing those few relatives who were alive, as well as friends of the family and relatives of relatives. I felt very privi-



leged that I could take a journey back in time and reconstruct over 50 years of silence.

Q How would you describe the book?

A It's about the settlement of Jews in Norway in the middle of the 19th century and what it was like until 1940 when Germany invaded Norway. I write about our experiences during the war and when my family escaped to Sweden. I also describe coming back to Norway after the liberation and growing up with two identities: Norwegian and Jewish.

Q Why is it important for you to share your story with others?

A I realize that most Americans know next to nothing about what happened in Norway during the Holocaust. We are coming to the end of the Holocaust generation; it is very important to bear witness to as much information as possible while there are still people around to tell their stories. ☺

up close

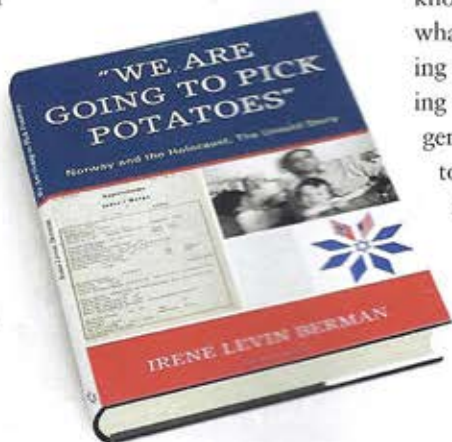
Name: Irene Levin Berman

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Book: "We Are Going to Pick Potatoes: Norway and the Holocaust, The Untold Story"

Want Irene Levin Berman to speak to your lodge?

Email her at irenelberman@aol.com. To learn more about Berman and her story, go to norwayandtheholocaust.com.



Available at amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.