



## Leap into Darkness: Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe

By Leo Bretholz, Michael Olesker

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### Leap into Darkness: Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe By Leo Bretholz, Michael Olesker

A harrowing, action-packed account of the author's series of audacious escapes from the Nazis' Final Solution--"riveting...a fascinating and moving piece of history" (*Library Journal*).

Young Leo Bretholz survived the Holocaust by escaping from the Nazis (and others) not once, but seven times during his almost seven-year ordeal crisscrossing war-torn Europe. He leaped from trains, outran police, and hid in attics, cellars, anywhere that offered a few more seconds of safety. First he swam the River Sauer at the German-Belgian border. Later he climbed the Alps on feet so battered they froze to his socks--only to be turned back at the Swiss border. He crawled out from under the barbed wire of a French holding camp, and hid in a village in the Pyrenees while gendarmes searched it. And in the dark hours of one November morning, he escaped from a train bound for Auschwitz.

**Leap into Darkness** is the sweeping memoir of one Jewish boy's survival, and of the family and the world he left behind.

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### **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Bretholz was 17 when, in 1938, the Germans took over his native Austria. His mother, more realistic than other relatives, saw disaster and insisted that he escape, which is what he did for the next seven years, traveling not only through Germany and Luxembourg but to Belgium, France and, briefly, Switzerland, to jails and numerous internment camps. Bretholz relied often on his youthful agility and daring to save himself from much worse; he escaped from a train headed for Auschwitz in 1942. He spent the last years of the war working for the French Resistance, emigrating in 1947 to Baltimore, where he ran a bookstore (frequented by coauthor and Baltimore Sun columnist Olesker). Whether telling of running or hiding, every paragraph in his memoir is harrowing. In one wrenching story, he tells of a young female friend who is menaced by a gendarme while he is forced to stay hidden, "crouched on the floor, helpless, emasculated, sickened." Bretholz is also smartly observant of the Austrians ("First victims,' they will call themselves when the world loses its memory."); opportunistic Swiss; and the French, so many of whom claimed to be Resistance. In the midst of many improbable escapes, there is also a sense of almost exhilarating determination?"I was now a miraculous athlete, a professional escape artist, a young man in perpetual flight. I was indomitable. Also, I was too terrified not to run for my life." For a man who assumed many false identities, the supreme irony came when Bretholz learned his true identity just six years ago?an event that provides a fitting climax to this inspiring and moving book. 40 b&w illustrations.

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#### Review

"Harrowing...In the midst of many improbable escapes, there is also a sense of almost exhilarating determination." --*Publishers Weekly*

"Riveting--a fascinating and moving piece of history." --*Library Journal*

"No one can read [this] history without realizing--the remarkable courage of individuals, and the tremendous importance of stories such as this being published for all to read." --Sir Marin Gilbert, author of **The Holocaust**

"This loving and lovely memoir should be read by everyone interested in the daily lives of young Jews caught in the Holocaust. Leo Bretholz's story grabs you, and it won't shake when you've finished the book." --Deborah Dwork, coauthor of **Auschwitz: 1270 to Present**

"This memoir is that rarest of all survivors: a man who jumped from a train on his way to a death camp. The reader is with Bretholz at every step, following with mounting tension his struggle to escape." --Raul Hilberg, author of **The Destruction of the European Jews**

#### From the Publisher

With tremendous endorsements and terrific writing, this memoir will take readers across the country by storm. The story reads like a suspense novel as much as a reflection on history's most evil days. A vibrant speaker at 77, Mr. Bretholz and co-author Michael Olesker (columnist, Baltimore Sun; news commentator, local CBS-affiliate) plan an active reading and lecture tour.

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