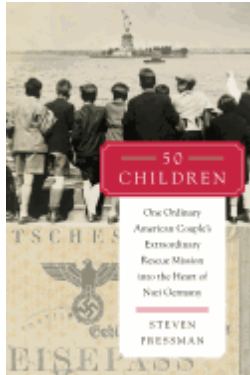




50 Children of Nazi Germany

Steven Pressman. HarperCollins, \$26.99 (304p) ISBN 978-0-06-223747-7



In this stirring account of determination against overwhelming odds, journalist Pressman (*Outrageous Betrayal*) expands on his eponymous HBO documentary wherein his wife's grandparents, Gilbert and Eleanor Kraus, worked to rescue 50 Viennese Jewish children from occupied territory during the early years of WWII. Drawing from interviews, historical documents, and Eleanor's private writings, Pressman reconstructs the chain of events, adding background and context. His flowing narrative breathes life into the America and Europe of 1938–1939, placing a spotlight on the impossible circumstances and contradictions of Nazi Germany's anti-Jewish pogroms, as Jews were encouraged to leave yet hindered at every turn. He looks at the obstacles thrown up by American attitudes and policies: isolationism, rigid immigration laws and quotas, and

rampant anti-Semitism made it unlikely that the Krauses' plan would ever work: "During the years when it was possible for Jews to leave Germany for the United States, American public opinion, government insensitivity, lack of interest, and a depressing failure of human compassion all worked against them." In contrast to his praise for the Krauses for spearheading their small but vital rescue effort, Pressman critiques American intransigence alongside more visible Nazi cruelties, and the whole makes for a story as troubling as it is inspirational. Illus. Agent: Elizabeth Kaplan. (May)

Reviewed on 01/31/2014 | [Details & Permalink](#)



The Krauses' Kids: PW Talks with Steven Pressman

By Michael M. Jones |
Mar 07, 2014

In [50 Children: One Ordinary American Couple's Extraordinary Rescue Mission into the Heart of Nazi Germany](#), journalist Pressman recounts how Gil and Eleanor Kraus, a Jewish-American couple, rescued 50 Jewish children from the heart of Austria during the early days of WWII.

What was it like to discover Eleanor's long-lost manuscript?

It was hiding in plain sight. My wife is one of the grandchildren of Gil and Eleanor Kraus. We met in San Francisco about 14 years ago, and she showed it to me fairly soon after we met. I had been a journalist for many years, and I knew it was an incredible story, assuming it was all true.

Did you have to do a lot of work for verification?

Absolutely. This unpublished memoir spelled out the rescue mission itself, what Eleanor and Gil had done. But beyond that, there was a broader historical context; very little of that is in the memoir itself. Eleanor describes what she and her husband are doing, but there's all this other stuff going on in the background: attitudes about immigration in the U.S., events in Nazi Germany, things going on in the American government at the time.

Did the attitudes within the U.S. government at the time surprise you?

I was a political science major in college, but I was still astonished by what was happening in the country during the 1930s, particularly the rampant anti-Semitism that existed among the public at large and within the government itself. I really wanted to focus on that because Gil and Eleanor had to deal with these people. They were up against incredible obstacles from the American government and from Nazi Germany.

Were there other surprises?

Eleanor alludes to opposition from some Jewish groups and community leaders in Philadelphia. They were also trying to do their own rescue efforts and were sharply opposed to what Gil and

Eleanor were doing, so they did their best to prevent the Krauses from going ahead with their plan. It surprised me that a couple trying to do this extraordinary thing was coming under that kind of opposition. Fortunately, they ignored it.

Now that you have both the documentary (also called 50 Children) and the book, are there any follow-ups planned?

I set a goal for myself to track down what happened to all 50 of the children. I wasn't able to, but I came close. I discovered what happened to all but 10 or 11 of them, and that was satisfying. The journalist in me wanted to dig further, but my objective was to keep the focus on Gil and Eleanor Kraus, set against a broader context. Out of the blue, I got an e-mail from a guy in Canada. He saw the film and recognized a woman he's known for years as one of the children. The film is now showing at festivals, and I'm doing some speaking; hopefully, when the book comes out, there'll be more of that. I'm still living with this story while I figure out what my next move will be.