

# *A Lesson in Activism for Young Adults: Danish Resistance During World War II*

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**I**n her 1994 Newbery acceptance speech, Lois Lowry relates a series of stories which illuminate episodes in her life that forced her to journey consciously from everyday, essentially safe and not particularly dimensional points of view to moments of clarity and questioning which had profound impact on her intellectual development and on her subsequent writings. She implies that, like Jonas in her Newbery winner, *The Giver*, she understands the appeal of “the familiar, comfortable, and safe” in life, but that, in order to find dimensions, one needs to journey, like Jonas, on “other rivers” to “Elsewhere” (Speech 365, 367). “Elsewhere” contains variety; it contains both pleasure and pain. Yet, as a writer, Lowry relates that “each time a child opens a book,” he or she enters a world of the imagination which allows “choices” and which grants “freedom.” In the world of literature, young people find that their intellectual life expands, for in this world there are “magnificent, wonderfully unsafe things” (Speech 367).

In her speech, Lowry also relates that she still receives questions regarding her earlier Newbery winner, *Number the Stars*. She has been asked whether or not it is necessary to tell the stories of the Holocaust “over and over” (364). Lowry replies with a response from her German daughter-in-law, who insists that events of the Holocaust must be told “again and again” (364).

Yet, perhaps no other world is so difficult to capture in literature, for its Elsewhere involves a perilous journey with unexplainable boundaries.

For young people, an alternate approach to that journey can involve entry through an examination of four young adult historical fiction novels, all of which are set in Denmark during the war years, and all of which involve young people choosing activism as a response to evil. These four books—Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*; Carol Matas's *Lisa's War* and its sequel, *Code Name Kris*; and Bjarne Reuter's *The Boys From St. Petri*—have been selected after both online Dialog searches and extensive reviews of bibliographies in print on the Holocaust and on Denmark's role during World War II.

In the section on Denmark in *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, Michael Berenbaum points out that "of all the countries of Nazi-occupied Europe, only Denmark rescued virtually all of its Jews" (157). Characters in these four books frequently raise such questions as how the Danes could resist despite the German occupation of their country, and several become directly involved in the Jewish rescue effort. The intellectual development of these young characters stems from their increasingly conscious choice to care and to act. They move, as Denmark itself actually did, from passive resistance to active involvement.

These books were also selected because each of their authors has based them on historical facts, because each received positive reviews in the press, and because Matas and Lowry are well established young adult authors. Reuter joins them, for I wanted to see if a Danish author offers the same themes and perspective. His concept of the social and aesthetic viewpoints in Denmark turns out to be very much like the others'. Finally, while these books appeal to a young adult audience, they range from Lowry's work, geared toward younger teens and preteens, to Matas's and Reuter's, which could interest a wide audience from approximately age twelve to adult. Along with Lois Lowry, each of these authors has the skill to relate stories of "Elsewhere" after carefully lulling the reader into a sense of how cozy and safe regular life could be.

These authors add dimension to their portrayals of Denmark by having characters recognize what Denmark was like before the war. Danes speak of "hygge" as something which defines

them. It is a difficult word to translate, but essentially a world of *hygge* is a world of comfort, a world in which all one's senses are satisfied. One book on Denmark, *Of Danish Ways*—with its chapters on Kings, Queens, Vikings, and Danish customs and holidays—gives an effective hint as to how Danes define themselves, for chapters on “world consciousness” and “social consciousness” are included along with a chapter on “courtesy and humor” (MacHaffie contents page). This somewhat quaint book, written by two Danish sisters, nonetheless, pinpoints something all three authors capture in their historical fiction. Over and over again, the occupiers are seen as rude and bullying. Over and over again, the Danish characters lament the loss of innocence—of Denmark as the home of Tivoli amusement park, which is “lit up with thousands of lights and looks like every child's dream of fairyland.” This type of description from Matas's *Code Name Kris* (16) appears in both Matas's and Lowry's works. Both authors use descriptions of fairy tales and Denmark as a sort of fairy tale kingdom not only to define it, but also to emphasize how its children are robbed of their idyllic dreams.

This description and others exemplify the loss of innocence as a theme that runs through all four works. In keeping with this theme, each of the books strongly stress peer and sibling relationships that frequently involve characters in the switch from passive to active resistance. As they move away from parental control and toward peer or sibling relationships, their intellectual development reflects an inner questioning that is marked by their increasingly outward participation in active, more dangerous sabotage actions. In her review of *The Boys from St. Petri*, Hazel Rochman aptly describes this book as “exciting adventure in the ever-popular World War II genre of ordinary kids fighting the Nazi occupation” (1003). She also explains that “what will hold readers is the action, the story of the boys' secret sabotage, and their loss of innocence” (1003).

Although historical fiction remains a popular genre for young adults, as Elizabeth Howard points out in *America As Story: Historical Fiction for Secondary Schools*,

there is a growing awareness being voiced both in the literature of education and in the general press that today's graduates of American high schools have little knowledge and less understanding of their country's past (xi).

In fact, this complaint extends to a lack of knowledge of history in general. Howard advocates incorporating historical fiction along with classroom texts so that students can begin “to see that history is alive. This will happen when they are able to think of history first of all as story” (xi). She suggests “that teachers consider assigning an appropriate novel (or novels) at the beginning of each new unit” as a means of “revitalizing history” (xii). This takes us back to Lois Lowry’s definition of literature as appealing to the minds and hearts of young people because the stories move them deeply. It also corresponds to Michael Berenbaum’s suggestion in *The World Must Know* regarding study of the Holocaust. He emphasizes that

the material is vast and can be overwhelming. A word of advice may help. Interweaving history with biography and reading primary material in conjunction with secondary sources are good ways to strike a balance between the bleak depersonalization of Holocaust history and the vivid power of individual stories. Diaries and memoirs, oral histories and novels should be read alongside the standard works in the field (224).

As a companion work to the four suggested historical fiction novels, I strongly recommend that any teacher or librarian include *The Rescue of the Danish Jews: Moral Courage Under Stress*, which contains not only historical background on Denmark during the war years but also personal narratives of Danes who participated in resistance efforts or who, as Jews, were helped in their escape to neutral Sweden. Students will relish these actual narratives, both for comparison with the events and characters in the novels and for the very real adventure stories the individuals tell with grace, humor, knowledge, and courage. This text also has contributions by academics who review the social, historical, and aesthetic character of Denmark in relationship to questions regarding the sense of collective responsibility the nation exhibited in its resistance efforts.

Thus, librarians and teachers could effectively use any one or all of these suggested historical fiction books along with *The Rescue of the Danish Jews*. At the very least, these works could be included in suggested reading lists or in bibliographies on the Holocaust years. However, these books could be used more effectively either in an introductory unit to the Holocaust or in library book discussion groups. In my own work as a Youth Services/Reference librarian, I have been able to keep a young

adult bookclub alive and well by allowing its members choices in their selection of books and subjects. Dealing with a subject like the Holocaust for young adults ranging from sixth grade through high school was made possible by affording them the variety represented in these works.

Before more closely examining the four novels and such themes as the movement from passive to active resistance, I would like to add some personal and general background information. The subsequent analysis of the historical fiction selections which follows this background could then easily serve to stimulate questions on which teachers or librarians could base their discussions.

As Lois Lowry related, every family has its stories, and among those stories each member finds special relevance in the narratives that best help to define and shape his or her lifelong interests. For me, tales of World War II, of the German occupation of my native Denmark, and of my family's history during those years served to fortify my belief that individual acts of moral courage can spread beyond the individual to produce countrywide activism and empowerment. I have spent most of my life in America, but my interest in Denmark as a positive example during the dark years of the Holocaust has grown.

Nineteen ninety-three marked the opening of the U.S. Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and it also marked the 50th anniversary of the rescue of the Danish Jews. Groups like Thanks to Scandinavia have encouraged the "memorializing ... [of the] incredible stories" which documented that rescue (*Thanks to Scandinavia 2*). Much more massive in scale, the U.S. Memorial Museum, which was "established by an Act of Congress ... is this country's official witness to the atrocities committed by the Nazis. ... but the museum provides hope as well as remembrance" in its displays on various resistance movements against the Nazis. These displays underscore the truth that there "is tremendous evil in the world, but tremendous good as well—and inside each of us is the power to choose" (Ryan).

Among these resistance displays is a small wooden boat that a Danish fisherman used to carry refugees to safety. My father and most of his family were among the 7,500 Jews rescued by a massive Danish resistance to the German roundup attempts of September 1943. They landed safely in neutral Sweden. Unfortunately, my teenage aunts, Aunt Eva and Aunt Ruth, were among the 481 Jews whom the Germans captured and sent to

Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Yet, even there, continued support “from the Danish civil service and church organizations” meant monthly “packages of clothing, food, and vitamins” as well as “Danish Red Cross” inspections of the camp. Eventually all but a few of the Danish Jews were able to return after the war to Denmark. “Protected for over five years by the heroic and persistent Danish people, the Danish Jews were spared from near certain death in Birkenau-Auschwitz and from being victims in the Final Solution” (Thanks to Scandinavia, *Resistance* 4–5).

Central to my personal response to the above facts has been the knowledge that my Aunt Ruth was able to save Aunt Eva’s life in Theresienstadt. Like many others, they almost starved, for many of their food parcels were in fact appropriated by camp personnel. However, Aunt Ruth generously shared her food with Aunt Eva, enabling her to survive. As this story was retold during the years that followed, my family was empowered by the knowledge of how the sisters had been able to support and sustain one another. Although both teenage girls had been turned over to the Nazis by a Danish traitor, during their capture my red-headed Aunt Ruth was at first not believed to be Jewish. She could actually have escaped, but she chose to stay with her older sister, insisting that they were in fact sisters and refusing to be separated. Both my emotional and intellectual response to their story has extended to a professional interest in displaying and collecting Holocaust material. Material such as the recently expanded second edition of Volavková’s *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children’s Drawing and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942–1944*, testifies that unlike the Danish Jews, so many others were sent to killing camps.

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi writes on the Holocaust in literature, trying to see how and if words can ever capture the reality of that period. She finds that even

the most vivid presentation of concrete detail and specificity, the most palpable reconstruction of Holocaust reality, is blunted by the fact that there is no analogue in human experience. The imagination loses credibility and resources where reality exceeds even the darkest fantasies of the human mind; even realism flounders before such reality. (3)

Young adults frequently study the Holocaust in middle school and again in high school as part of curricula that focus on

“the history of the murder of the European Jews” in lessons centered on “Global Studies” and “World Cultures” (Dawidowicz 67). Curricula attempt to “do two things, first, to give students basic information, and, second, to provide appropriate moral education. They are better at the first task than at the second, and better at describing what happened than explaining why it happened (Dawidowicz 69). In order to provide lessons in both the “what” and the “why,” it is possible to use Danish resistance as a symbol of moral courage by tracing the obstacles that the characters in the young adult novels above must face. Empowerment in these novels is possible, for characters live in a society in which ultimately all facets—from the King, to the Church, to the Jewish population, to individual students—accepted the moral challenge of staying positively active despite individual fear.

Still, these books can provide only an entry into any larger discussion of the Holocaust. As stated, Danish Jews were not sent to killing camps. These narratives, like many other works of fiction, stay outside the camps. “In the history of Holocaust literature there are relatively few stories which are actually located in the camps; most of them ... reach the periphery of the concentrationary universe ... [for the] concentration camp is a world without exit” (Ezrahi 52). For students looking for works inside that concentrationary universe, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* provide vivid entry. Abraham J. and Hershel Edelheit’s *Bibliography On Holocaust Literature* is one of many excellent bibliographies that lead to additional sources.

In the *Supplement* volume to this collection, the Edelheits define different categories of resistance: there are the “spiritual, moral, individual, collective, spontaneous, and organized” forms, as well as different activities from “sabotage” to “anti-German propaganda and espionage” to “armed resistance” (7). Certainly in Denmark early resistance efforts lacked organization, as early “resistance meant action first—policy later” (Hæstrup *Secret Alliance* 203). Anger and dissatisfaction over an unwanted German occupation consistently propelled the Danish resistance members, many of whom, like the characters in historical fiction, were teenagers—teenagers who like Stefan in Matas’s two books lacked patience with Denmark’s occupation from the beginning: “Surrendered! We never even tried! We hardly fired a shot! Should we all go out there and lick the German’s boots now, too” (*Lisa’s War* 3)? Teenagers like Stefan

entered the resistance early, aflame with passion and indignation, while much of Denmark, like their beloved King Christian X, favored displays of quiet dignity, aware of Germany's power and of the long history of hostility between the two countries.

Denmark was central to the "Nazi ideology which saw Scandinavians as Aryan brothers and aimed at making them German satellites" (Seymour 49–50). In addition, "the Germans wanted Denmark to be neutral because of her importance as a supplier of food to Germany and her strategic position at the entrance to the Baltic" (Seymour 50). In contrast, many Danes felt that the Germans had no understanding of them—of their humor, tolerance, and essential lack of racial or religious stereotyping. This difference appears over and over again both in informational narratives on the war years and in fiction. Central to the increasing activism shown in all sources is the Danish conviction expressed from the King on down that "there was no Jewish problem in Denmark." Ironically, this

attitude was so widespread that [even] German publications took note of it. In the spring of 1941, the official German journal *Die Judenfrage* carried an article under the headline DENMARK—A COUNTRY WITHOUT A JEWISH PROBLEM? The author went on to complain that preoccupation with racial problems was considered "un-Danish." (Petrow 197)

From a historical perspective, this opposition to anti-Semitism was part of a tradition dating back to 1690, when

a Danish police chief was relieved of his duties for daring to suggest that Denmark should follow the example of other European countries and establish a ghetto in Copenhagen. The Danish Parliament had immediately followed the dismissal of the police chief by passing a resolution condemning the very idea of a ghetto as "an inhuman way of life." (Flender 30)

Thus, Danes have historically been unwilling to isolate any one group. In Danish society this attitude strengthened during World War II. The Danish historian, Jørgen Hæstrup, has written extensively on Denmark during World War II. In the second chapter of *The Rescue of the Danish Jews*, he clearly outlines events of this period. The German occupation began on April 9th, 1940. Initially, passive resistance was the dominant response, but as time passed "scattered incidents of active sabo-

tage and the beginning of an extremely significant underground press (growing steadily to more than five-hundred separate papers and three-hundred books and pamphlets" helped prompt a more and more active resistance (Hæstrup 19). Among the Jewish population in Denmark, not only Danish citizens but "almost 2,200 individuals who did not hold Danish citizenship" (20) were fully integrated into Danish society. At no time did Danes allow ordinances against the Jews to go into effect.

While this paper cannot possibly cover all the fascinating details of how Denmark managed to maintain this situation until 1943, young people will appreciate individual episodes outlined in Hæstrup's chapter. So, for instance, the Danish Supreme Court actually "sentenced ... [a] would be arsonist of the synagogue ... on the ground of anti-Semitic activities" to jail time "despite the fact that Denmark was occupied by the Germans" (32). By 1943, this and other types of spirited behavior resulted in severe crackdowns, which in turn prompted nationwide protests and strikes. The Germans ended their "so-called moderate" approach: they "declared a state of emergency" and eventually placed the Danish King under "house arrest" (38, 45). By early October of 1943, the attempted roundup of the Jews in Denmark began. The events surrounding that attempt actually served to unite the Danish resistance effort. Each of the four historical fiction novels also stresses this point of view.

For one thing, Danes prided themselves collectively on not succumbing to propaganda efforts. Currently, Bjarne Reuter, an extremely popular author of many Danish books, follows this tradition. In *The Boys from St. Petri*, Mrs. Balstrup does not know that her two sons, Gunnar and Lars, are members of the resistance. Their father is the local minister, and the young men join their friends in a secret organization that meets in the church loft. Their family has strong ties to the town's organist, Filip Rosen, who as a Jew typifies Danish Jews of the time. Since religion was typically considered a private matter, Danish Jews were integrated into all aspects of society. Thus Rosen, famous for his exquisite playing, lives in the rectory. Throughout this novel, Reuter contrasts Rosen's individual musical style with the brass band music that the Germans love to play. When Rosen is forced to flee the rectory, the Balstrups find the sound of that band almost unbearable: they sit in their living room, listening to this music now "swelling, crescendoing, filtering in through every crevice." To them, it oppressively mingles with the

sounds of “German boots marching down Østergade as if that were the most natural thing in the world” (Reuter 155).

Before Rosen is forced to flee, Mrs. Balstrup briefly wonders whether the town’s increasing sabotage activity is somehow to blame. Her son Lars turns their discussion into an ethical debate. He quickly convinces her not to fall for German propaganda. Lars reminds his mother that he agrees with the position of his father, who had in an earlier scene defiantly told the Nazis searching Rosen’s room that Rosen had not engaged in any resistance or broken any Danish laws (Reuter 148). Lars warns his mother against blaming the saboteurs for the gestapo actions. The gestapo seeks “excuses” for their actions “so as to turn ordinary people against both the Jews and the saboteurs” (150). Ultimately he pleads, “I can’t bear to see you falling for their propaganda too” (150), to which she poignantly replies: “All I know is we’re losing Rosen” (150). Lars rationalizes to himself that “of course there was nothing really the matter with her powers of judgement—if these methods worked in the huge county of Germany, then why wouldn’t they work in Denmark too” (150)? Ultimately, Reuter concludes this passage by having Lars’s mother take her son’s side. Lars confides that he hates the Germans, and Mrs. Balstrup responds, “Yes. . . . To hell with them all” (150).

Mrs Balstrup, much like the other mothers in the four historical fiction novels, functions as representative of “hygge.” Not only do mothers frequently recall home life before the occupation, but their children also remember instances before the war when their mothers could protect and nourish them. Both children and their mothers must recognize the new reality that the war imposes upon them. It takes them from the comfort of home to the obstacles of Elsewhere. So, for example, Jesper in *Code Name Kris* can only allow himself a brief visit home after he has gone underground in the resistance movement. His mother sees him after a long absence, and she speaks in a choked, whispering voice of how he has changed (Matas 63). She notes his growth, wonders how he eats and whom he lives with; he in turn longs to stay at home with her. He does return to his resistance work, but only after an internal struggle, for at heart he still wants the comfort of childhood—he still longs for normality. He finally leaves, but only after inwardly admitting that

I wanted to go to sleep in my own bed, and to go to school in the morning and to start studying English literature again. I wanted

my mother to take care of me and baby me; regret poured over me as I understood that would never happen again (63).

This longing for childhood will be readily understandable to adolescent readers, for theirs is an age of increasing peer relationships, and they frequently struggle to gain independence from parental control. So too, Lars in *The Boys from St. Petri* discovers that it is one thing to choose that independence as a natural part of growing up, but another thing to have it thrust upon one in response to a national crisis. Once Rosen flees their home, Lars, like Jesper, recognizes that the old order has passed. He finds no comfort in his mother's afternoon coffee rituals; he sits with his family in their dining room, looks around, and listens to "the grandfather clock routinely slicing the hours into little bits" (155). Lars senses that now Rosen is no longer among them, their inability to protect him has left them with hollow rituals. Rosen "had left a gaping black hole, a dreadful sense of loss, behind him" (155).

Nonetheless, for the Danes in these fictional accounts, as with the Danes in historical accounts, the attempted roundup of the Danish Jews ultimately unites the nation. In *The Rescue of the Danish Jews*, one of the most moving personal narratives is by Dr. Jørgen Kieler, who recalls his activist student days. He feels that the Germans made a giant "blunder" in attempting to "persecute Danish Jews" (146)—that the attempt propelled many in Denmark from passive to active resistance and granted them "the opportunity to 'protect one's younger brother with one's own body.' The opportunity was seized by numerous people who had been living in an ethical conflict for months" (146). Dr. Kieler's narrative retains the intensity of his student days; like the leading characters in the fictional accounts, Dr. Kieler indicates that for his group of friends no compromises were possible. For them "an occupied country has a choice between two alternatives, i.e., collaboration with the enemy or active resistance" (142).

In the historical fiction, such ethical conflicts result in several symbolic extensions like Dr. Kieler's, extensions in which central characters enlarge their family structures. So in *The Boys from St. Petri*, Rosen is accepted as a family member with the approval of the whole family. So too in *Number the Stars*, the parents of Annemarie Johansen, the central character, value her friendship with her Jewish friend, Ellen Rosen. When the October 1943

roundup begins, Annemarie's parents agree to hide Ellen with them. Their family has lost a beloved daughter, Lise, to the resistance, but Lise's death is not talked about, and young Annemarie nurtures her memory in private. Mr. Johansen speaks of Lise out loud for the first time in years when he suggests that Annemarie and Ellen pretend to be sisters. He counsels them not to be afraid, and he inspires them to be brave by relating that "once I had three daughters. Tonight I am proud to have three daughters again" (38). Annemarie, Ellen, and Annemarie's little sister all benefit by such adult examples of courage. Annemarie is in turn able to help Ellen once the soldiers arrive to brutally question them. She quickly hides Ellen's Star of David necklace, and she finds that after the soldiers leave she has its "imprint" firmly edged in her palm (49). By extension, she and Ellen become not just close peers or intense friends; they unite as symbolic sisters.

Several such relationships exist in Carol Matas's accounts, too. In *Lisa's War*, Lisa's family "adopts" two new members as the war worsens. Lisa and her friend Susanne both carry out resistance efforts. Matas knows the types of details guaranteed to grab young adults' attention. Susanne's beautiful long blond hair is completely burned off in a German bombing. Susanne arrives at Lisa's apartment in a state of shock. Lisa opens the door to find that "Susanne is looking at me. She has no hair—only charred frizz is left. Her clothes are simply tatters. She is covered in blisters. I look at her. I think I'm screaming. I must be" (41). Soon Matas has Lisa's family take in Susanne, whose parents were killed; and they take care of a little girl, Sarah, whose parents are also killed in a vivid scene in the hospital where Lisa's father is a doctor.

That adoption adds another ethical dimension, for the baby—unlike Lisa's family—is not Jewish. Soon Lisa faces a most painful dilemma when her family has to escape to neutral Sweden. She holds Sarah, but she finds herself sitting or lying awake all night, for she cannot stop thinking of the impossible position they place her in. She wonders "if these will be my last memories. ... Sarah is my only comfort, but also my greatest burden. Could they kill a little baby like her?" she questions. Finally she must conclude that she knows "they could. And they want to. They want to. They want us all dead" (81).

Thus these authors, while they do not enter the world of concentration camps, do, nevertheless, have their characters face

one of the most terrifying aspects of the Holocaust. During this period, parents lost the ability to protect the lives of their children; during this period, children had no special protection. Nothing, not even the great resistance stories, can ease the intellectual leap that young adults must make in facing that fact. Books such as these, in which characters unite to save each other and each others' children, soften the larger picture as well as provide alternative examples, but ultimately, as *The World Must Know* relates,

in the end, children were deported along with their parents to concentration camps. Mothers and fathers could no longer protect their young. Parents who refused to be separated from their children were sent at once to the gas chambers. ... The young children, and the parents who insisted on staying with them, went to their death (Berenbaum 194).

Similarly, Jeshajahu Weinberg, the Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, asserts powerfully that the "understanding of the passive bystander's inadvertent guilt is probably the most relevant moral lesson the museum can teach its visitors" (Berenbaum xv). Berenbaum himself emphasizes that the Danish response, in contrast, may stem from the fact that Danes "simply treated Jews as the neighbors they were, and one does not allow the enemy who occupies one's country to deport neighbors. The explanation for their behavior may well be as simple as that" (159).

Clearly in the four historical fiction novels and in historical narratives, the portrayal of neighbors as heroic helpers is repeated in many exciting examples. In all four works of historical fiction, as in actuality, Jews could turn to their neighbors for help once the attempted Nazi roundup of the Danish Jews began. So too, characters are peers and friends who have established close ties based on proximity and daily exchanges. In *Number the Stars*, Annemarie and her best friend, Ellen, live in the same apartment house, attend school together, and at times exchange visits during their respective Christian and Jewish holidays. Likewise in *Lisa's War* and its sequel, *Code Name Kris*, Stefan and his sister Lisa, who are Jewish, grow increasingly close to Jesper, who is not. At one point Lisa passionately questions, "What does it matter that we are Jewish? I don't feel any different from anyone else, and I'm not treated differently" (*Lisa's War* 57). If anything, war and the Nazi's increasing anti-Semitism

function to heighten the brotherly tie between Stefan and Jesper, as well as the growing romance between Lisa and Jesper. Before the war, their families exchanged visits during Easter and Passover, while during the war their relationship takes on new dimensions. In *Code Name Kris*, Jesper relates an example of their new roles. He explains that their activism grows alongside their romance, that in reality the excitement of each spills over to the other: "Lisa and I would go to a movie in the afternoon and a sabotage action after dinner. By that time there were six or seven sabotage acts every day" (13).

Effective dramatic tension builds throughout both books as Carol Matas has the three become involved in increasingly dangerous acts; they go from distributing underground newspapers to eventually participating in sabotage and armed resistance during the attempted roundup of Denmark's Jews. Danger to all of them increases as their activities intensify, but Matas especially underscores Lisa and Stefan's unique position as Jews. Neither is welcomed at first in underground activities. Stefan must initially fight to be allowed to participate

because the resistance doesn't want Jewish people in dangerous situations, situations where they can be caught. The Germans will only use that as an excuse. "See, here we have Jewish saboteurs. Now you see why we have to round up the Jews and send them away. They threaten the very peace of Denmark." (*Lisa's War* 15)

Here too, young activists like Stefan refuse to let a power from without segregate them from activities within Denmark. In the personal narrative of *The Rescue of the Danish Jews*, the same type of struggle Stefan faced in order to be included in resistance efforts is chronicled. As Jørgen Hæstrup points out, Jewish participation in the resistance seemed "contrary to the Jewish leadership's strategy, which called for trustful loyalty to the government" (39). He indicates that "even minor indications of Jewish resistance activity could have ... carried severe consequences for the whole Jewish community" (39).

In *Code Name Kris*, Stefan, who at the end of *Lisa's War* has sailed to safety in neutral Sweden, returns to risk his life to further the resistance because he cannot in all conscience let Jesper or Denmark fight on alone. Increasingly throughout *Code Name Kris*, Matas shows her characters making moral choices that reflect their evolving perceptions of what constitutes right and wrong. Realistically, she has them enter a grey area of not easily

chosen options once their lives are actually threatened. Lisa especially fears that their actions change them beyond control: "My God, I think, these Germans are dragging us all down to their level. How will we keep ourselves better than them" (*Lisa's War* 46)? By the end of this novel Matas has Lisa and Jesper share in the killing of a young German soldier who is trying to prevent the escape of several Jewish families to Sweden. Matas has just shown how absolutely terrified the escaping families were; in fact, she has the father of one family slit the throats of his wife and two young children just before they think they are to be captured. Obviously, this is difficult for both the young reader and the characters to witness. In this section Lisa's internal debate consists of grotesque questions. Matas has taken her characters one step further into the war. They enter the realm in which children die, and Lisa struggles with her thoughts. She keeps remembering what the children looked like, and she compulsively wonders if their mother held them while the father carries out his actions (88).

Immediately afterwards, Lisa and Jesper kill the soldier, with Lisa narrating how really frightful the act was: he "shrieks, then falls over. ... He's screaming horribly" (94) until Jesper finishes the killing. Early on we learn that Lisa has a weak stomach, as she constantly fears vomiting during times of stress. Now she "retches" in the bushes, feeling worse afterwards, with no possible relief. In contrast, the aware reader remembers the younger Lisa, who in her first resistance effort threw up all over a soldier on a streetcar as she tried to distribute underground papers. She and the others had roared with laughter, but now she can only keep working to save others until she too is finally on a boat to Sweden. At the conclusion even Stefan and Jesper have tired. They also long for liberation from the reality of fighting.

Still, their friendship unites them, both in *Lisa's War* and in *Code Name Kris*. Their bond is based on a shared history. So too does Bjarne Reuter focus on the friendships of the young characters in *The Boys From St. Petri*. But while he begins this book by showing characters like Gunnar and his brother Lars entering resistance work with a group of lifelong friends, Reuter soon builds dramatic tension by having an outsider, Otto, join them. Suddenly Lars and his friends, with their elaborate rituals and joining ceremonies seem, like naive schoolboys in contrast to Otto, who unlike the others is private, untalkative, and from a working class background.

Otto's home life is also different. He functions like a parent to his younger siblings, and his mother is in his own words an "army mattress," a prostitute for German soldiers (Reuter 161). Otto's anger at that leaves him frequently silent, certainly not a joiner in the others' club, yet in the end he is the one to lead the group into action. He brings them their first gun, and he has no problems with dangerous sabotage missions; in fact, he longs for them. At the end of this work Reuter has the others taken prisoner, yet Otto escapes. Reuter seems to say that Otto, who works best alone and follows "his own strategy, carrying out his own plan," represents the new order of survival (85). He is the foil for the other characters.

In her Masters thesis on *War and Peace in Adolescent Literature*, Faye Lander comments that an

important aspect in most books for students is character development and growth. Many of these stories deal with adolescent struggles. Most works continuously emphasize that even in wartime or in concentrations camps, life continues as before with familiar patterns and social institutions. ... Adolescents, particularly those who remained with their parents, exhibited rebellion or resentment against their parents. (19)

With the exception of Otto, however, teenage and youthful rebellion in all four novels is directed not against parents but against the larger Nazi authorities. Family and resistance members learn to keep secrets from one another as their activities increase, but this was a typical precaution. The family remains important.

In Lowry's book, with Annemarie as its young protagonist, there is a pull or a wish for normality, parallel to the "normality" Denmark hoped for during the earlier occupation period. Both Annemarie and Ellen look to adults in their family for guidance. Likewise, Lars and Gunnar find much to respect in their father's actions. The minister seldom misses a chance to let his opinions show in his sermons, and he "listened avidly to the radio—the broadcasts from London were positively sacred" (Reuter 49). Similarly, Lisa's father, a doctor, is able to help in his own right, much like actual Danish doctors. Once the roundup began, hospitals served as hiding centers, and many physicians helped in the rescue operation.

But just as the attempted roundup of the Jews involved all segments of Danish society, so Denmark, as it rebelled and

entered into a nationwide strike against its oppressors, found that there was no turning back. Martial law and increasing activism prevailed. All of this is depicted, especially in Matas's books. She does have her characters work independently from their parents, but with the implication that those parents fear yet understand the activities they assume their children engage in. Ultimately, and this would appeal to adolescent readers, young characters make their own decisions. In a very real sense, group activity within the resistance legitimizes the natural inclination young people have to favor and relish peer relationships. Thus, Lisa poignantly thinks of her parents on the way to Sweden while she hunts the shore for Germans. She pictures "Mother and Father looking back through the dark, wishing Stefan and I were with them," yet she can act on the choice to stay behind. She stays behind with her sibling, and with their peer, Jesper. Together they move out of the realm of parental control (*Lisa's War* 96).

Lois Lowry also has ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen make brave and moral choices, yet ironically it is her mother who has to push her into the adult world of responsibility. All along in *Number the Stars*, adults set moral examples. Annemarie's uncle questions her carefully to see if she intellectually understands concepts of bravery. He finds her responsive, and she gradually is told more and more about their attempts to have Ellen's family and others escape. Having proved herself brave beyond her years, Annemarie eventually risks her life to spirit the Rosen family to freedom once her mother is injured, and she has to journey alone through the woods in her mother's place in order to deliver a specially scented handkerchief to her Uncle, the fisherman. The handkerchief is soaked in a special formula designed to throw Nazi guard dogs off the scent. While the adults shield Annemarie from the details of what she carries and how it might help, she cannot be spared the long journey through the woods.

Interestingly, in that journey Lowry has Annemarie comfort herself by reciting parts of *Little Red Riding Hood*. However, as Annemarie carries out her journey through the woods, armed soldiers pursue her with "two large dogs, their eyes glittering, their lips curled," combining into a horrible image of the menacing wolf (112). Surely, Denmark as the fairy tale kingdom—as the place where "all Danish children grew up familiar with fairy tales"—has changed, but Annemarie's ability to act out those

tales in fact saves her (Lowry 11). Earlier she had told them to lull her younger sister to sleep, now she uses this one to calm herself as she walks, and she uses a version of it in acting out the part of “a silly little girl” who keeps “chattering away” until the soldiers leave her alone (114).

Earlier it is also Annemarie who symbolically hides Ellen’s Star of David necklace among her own dead sister’s belongings, and it is Annemarie who, at the end of the novel when newly freed Denmark awaits the return of its Jews, decides to wear the necklace until Ellen comes back. Denmark alone, with its protests against discrimination, manages to survive without Jews’ being forced to wear the Star of David as a badge to segregate and identify them. By extension, it is Annemarie who voices one of the moral lessons of the novel. Previously, her father had commented on how brave King Christian X was. His daily horseback rides through Copenhagen rallied the whole country behind him. Annemarie’s father relates that all of Denmark serves as the king’s bodyguard, and that “any Danish citizen would die for King Christian, to protect him” (14). Once the Danish Jews are threatened, it is Annemarie who expands on this symbolic concept. Young as she is, she intellectualizes this image one step further by realizing that “now I think that all of Denmark must be bodyguard for the Jews, as well” (25). Both in action and in thought, Annemarie carries out her convictions. She emerges as a young heroine easily identifiable to young people. *Booklist’s* review rightly stresses that while “the novel has an absorbing plot, its real strength lies in its evocation of deep friendship between two girls and of a caring family who make a profoundly moral choice to protect others during wartime” (Olderr and Smith, 86).

In wartime, death and loss—or the possibilities of death and loss—hover together. Otto breaks up the friendship of Gunnar and his lifelong friend, Søren, who quits their group once Otto shows himself willing to kill Nazi soldiers. In Otto’s view such things happen; after all it is wartime, but in Søren’s view there are no fine lines to ponder. He denounces his friends and their group; he quits after calling Otto a “murderer”. In the end, he wants out from under the burden of Gunnar’s intellectualizing. Gunnar had quietly asked him “where do we draw the line between what you call murderers and what the rest of Denmark calls patriots” (Reuter 145)?

That type of question ultimately haunts many of the charac-

ters in these books. At the close of *Code Name Kris*, Jesper hopes to find release through his skills as a journalist. He learns them writing for underground papers, but at the end he hopes to tell his story and somehow purge himself of its horrors. His first person narrative is penetrating throughout. Carol Matas respects her audience; she does include explicit passages, but she carefully and clearly leads her characters through the types of ethical debates young people can identify with.

Finally, both Lowry's and Matas's versions of the occupation also underscore the danger of the war years by having important characters die; each author is willing to show her audience that resistance efforts could lead to profound loss, especially in *Code Name Kris*. Matas's haunting description of the death of Janicke, a young resistance fighter, comes as a shocking climax to a long period in which the relationship between Janicke, Jesper, and Stefan has been carefully detailed.

Likewise, as we have seen in *Number the Stars*, Annemarie's intense sister-like bond with her best friend Ellen is strengthened by the earlier death of Lise, Annemarie's older sister. Yet, as is appropriate for a younger audience, we do not "witness" death. Instead, Annemarie frequently recollects previous times when Lise had celebrated her engagement to fun-loving Peter. Annemarie lovingly looks through the blue trunk in their bedroom in which "were folded Lise's pillowcases with their crocheted edges, her wedding dress with its hand-embroidered neckline, unworn, and the yellow dress that she had worn and danced in, with its full skirt flying, at the party celebrating her engagement to Peter" (16).

As we have seen, in all four books Denmark becomes increasingly tense under German rule; but in Lowry's version, the most hopeful of the four, we, along with Annemarie, do not learn until near the end that Lise and Peter were both in the resistance and that Lise's death occurred during a Nazi raid. Young Peter's letter, written the night before he is executed by the Nazis, asks his loved ones to remember that "he was proud to have done what he could for his country and for the sake of all free people" (129). His thoughts echo the words of an actual Danish resistance fighter who on the night before his own death wrote:

I want you all to remember—that you must not dream yourselves back to the times before the war, but the dream for you all, young and old, must be to create an ideal of human decency, and not a

narrow-minded and prejudiced one. This is the great gift our country hungers for. . . . (Thomas 107)

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