



The Mascot: Unraveling the Mystery of My Jewish Father's Nazi Boyhood

By Mark Kurzem

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The "spellbinding" (*The New York Times*) true story of a Jewish boy who became the darling of the Nazis

When a Nazi death squad massacred his mother and fellow villagers, five-year-old Alex Kurzem escaped, hiding in the freezing Russian forest until he was picked up by a group of Latvian SS soldiers. Alex was able to hide his Jewish identity and win over the soldiers, becoming their mascot and an honorary "corporal" in the SS with his own uniform. But what began as a desperate bid for survival became a performance that delighted the highest ranks of the Nazi elite. And so a young Jewish boy ended up starring in a Nazi propaganda film.

After sixty-three years of silence, Alex revealed his terrible secret to his son Mark. With his son's help, Alex retraced his past in search of answers and vindication. His story is at once a terrifying account of survival and its psychological cost as well as a brutally honest examination of identity, complicity, and memory.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Part mystery, part memory puzzle, it is written in the polished style of a good thriller, and it is spellbinding.... This is a book to keep you up at night.”—**Dinitia Smith**, *New York Times*

“Astonishing.”—**Caroline Sanderson**, *The Bookseller*

“Powerful.”—**Olga Craig**, *The Sunday Telegraph (LONDON)*

About the Author

Mark Kurzem grew up in Melbourne, Australia. He studied anthropology at the University of Oxford, where he was a Commonwealth Scholar, and also studied at Melbourne, Jochi, and Tokyo universities, where he was a Monbusho Research Scholar. He worked in the fields of political research, international relations, teaching, and filmmaking in Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom. He wrote and co-produced a documentary about his father’s life, also titled *The Mascot*, which was the subject of international attention. He died in 2010.

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