



## The Forger: An Extraordinary Story of Survival in Wartime Berlin

By Cioma Schonhaus

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### The Forger: An Extraordinary Story of Survival in Wartime Berlin By Cioma Schonhaus

When his family is deported to concentration camps in 1942, 20-year-old draftsman Cioma Schönhaus goes underground. Recruited to a network dedicated to rescuing Jews from the gas chambers, Schönhaus discovers a life-saving talent for falsifying identity cards. While working on his forgeries, he changes address every night, relying on girlfriends and the friendship of anti-Nazi Germans to keep him one step ahead of the Gestapo. But when his face finally appears on Gestapo wanted posters all over the city, he decides the time has come to attempt a breathtaking escape from Berlin to Switzerland—by bicycle.

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### **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This memoir of a Jewish man's experience in wartime Berlin is less a tale of suffering than of courage. By 1942, Schonhaus's family had been deported; the 20-year-old was spared because he worked in an arms factory. In that year, he began using his graphics background to forge IDs for Jews in hiding, and eventually went underground himself. His efforts, aided by anti-Nazi Germans, saved the lives of hundreds of Jews. He maintains a determined tone about the war—At last, I didn't have to just look on helplessly at what they were doing to us, he writes about being asked to forge documents—but Schonhaus's account has all the elements of a thriller. (In fact, Schonhaus's story is being made into a film.) Despite the doom around him, he lives boldly, enjoying sailing escapades and sexual encounters with women, seemingly defying the Nazi authorities to find him until he flees over the border into Switzerland. While adding to our knowledge about wartime Berlin, this work also tells us something about how the human spirit can thrive amid destruction and tragedy. (*Feb. 1*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Schonhaus was born in Berlin in 1922, the only child of immigrant Russian Jews who had moved there after World War I. In 1942 his family was deported to Majdanek and Theresienstadt concentration camps. Schonhaus was not taken because of his job in the arms industry, where he was able to sabotage machine-gun barrels. He eventually was forced to go underground, and he used his training as a graphic artist to forge ID papers for Jews in hiding. He was able to get some support from anti-Nazi Germans. When the Gestapo tried to capture him, the author escaped by bicycle to Switzerland, where he still lives. (The book is being made into a film.) The Forger, with illustrations by Schonhaus, was first published in Germany in 2004 and is a compelling story of a courageous man. --George Cohen

Review

\* 'This is so remarkable a story of survival - with its almost apologetic air of fairy tale - that the sceptical might wonder at its authenticity... The writing says otherwise: it has the understated, random improbability of truth' *Guardian* 'Now in his eighties, Schonhaus recalls his adventures with gusto... honest and thoughtful... a real page-turner' *BBC History Magazine*

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