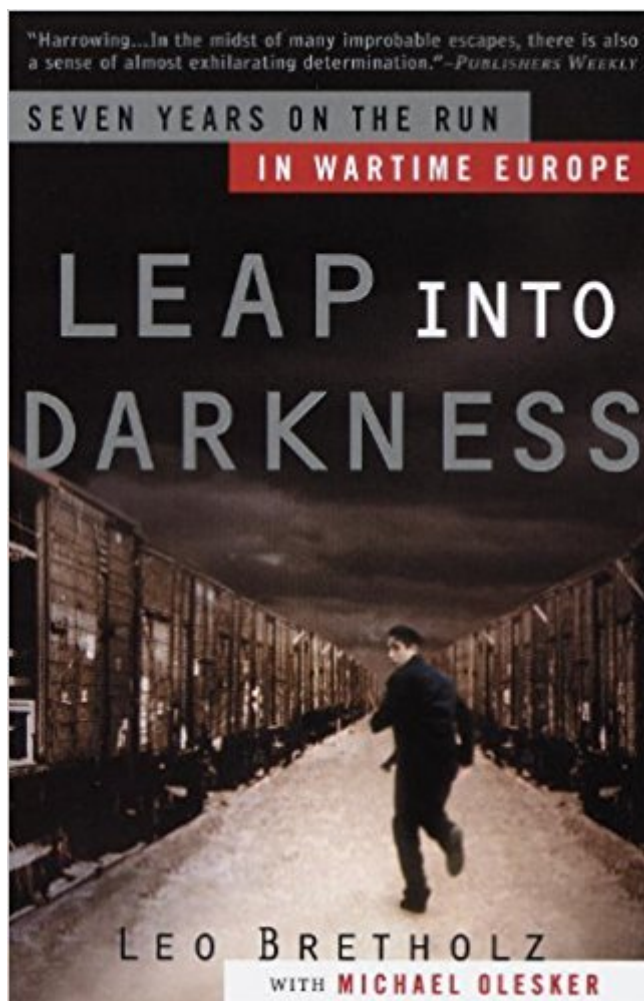


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# Leap Into Darkness: Seven Years On The Run In Wartime Europe



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"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*

I have a never ending hunger to learn all I can of the Holocaust to know the truth and pass it on. There are so very many books out there on the subject and some each day as the number of survivors is getting smaller everyday. Not being Jewish myself I still feel lead to do this. I was so taken in by this account. I could feel all of the emotions just like I was there, not like I was looking in from the outside. Leo Bretholz is sent away by his mother in an effort to save his life. Leo goes from one camp to another but always manages to escape. Not once or twice but SEVEN times. It is nothing short of a miracle. The hardest feeling to read about was his guilt in leaving his sisters and mother behind. How do you deal with surviving when you don't know the fate of your loved ones. When the letters stop arriving what then? I think that is what drove him was the hope that in the end

they would all be together again. I'll not ruin it and tell you how that turns out. I highly recommend this if you like reading encouraging stories that are true accounts of the holocaust. It is a real page turner and I could not put it down. Thank you Mr Bretholz for sharing this history with us lest we not forget. I thank G-d you survived.

I have read widely on the Holocaust, and this book is simply riveting, written in a suspenseful and engaging style of English with a high level of vocabulary. I am so thankful to Mr. Bretholz for writing this revealing book which chronicles the hardships of his flight for his life, the palpating fear, the deaths he witnessed, the innocents he saw die, and the detailed dreadful cruelty of those who were determined to wipe out any and all simply for being "Jewish". It is a sobering insight into discrimination and a lesson not lost that when a nation, a people, a government decide to discriminate against one group of people, for whatever reason, and the horrific consequences that follow, especially when the discrimination is written into law, and it becomes "ok" to discriminate and kill. The book has wonderful photos that connect the reader to the people and places that Leo knew and fled to. The story is detailed as to dates and places and names and events. It is really a historical saga not to be missed.

The author died recently and when I read his obituary, I was compelled to read his memoir. Amazingly, he escaped several times, including once off a train headed to Aushwitz. He was a young man of only 17 when he escaped Vienna after the Nazi Anschluss. He went to different countries and was captured and escape a number of times. The cruelty of the Nazis (and of conquered people including to his horror, his Viennese neighbors) combined with his ability to survive his escapes is a wrenching story. The author was part of a class action suit against the French railway company which allowed Nazi transports, such as he was on, to take Jews from France to death camps.

Told from the 1st person perspective, Bretholz's memoir had an authentic ring to it. He did not decorate his truths; rather, he presented the atrocity that was persecution of Jews in a very matter-of-fact, documenting voice. I appreciated the fact that he was not pandering to his readers' sympathies, but was still able to convey the harsh reality of the lives of Jews in wartime Europe.

I couldn't put this book down. There wasn't a moment that I was bored or uninterested, and Leo did not spend any time discussing the politics. He told his story, his very interesting and heartbreaking

story. He survived time and time again, bringing tears to my eyes. The time when he escaped the train had me on the edge of my seat in such worry for him. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in holocaust survivor stories.

I just finished reading *Leap Into Darkness, Seven Years on the run in Wartime Europe*. I agree with Leo's descriptions of the different countries during WWII--the majority did welcome the Nazis, and they were incredibly anti-semitic across the continent. Of course, this does not apply to every single person, but none-the-less, the atrocity happened, and each country and person needed to look at it's compliance. I've read books before that say you can't hold the people accountable for the actions taken in WWII, but I disagree with that. Leo was very trusting, and in a way he was easily persuaded, but thank goodness for that, because it saved him many times. He listened to others, but he also listened to his common sense. I'm very glad that he survived, and that he can bear witness--this is something that must never be forgotten. Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.

What an horrifying journey it was for Leo Bretholz born in Austria, Vienna on the run for his life simply based on his creed. "*Leap into the Darkness*" will captivate readers from beginning-to-end. For close to 7 years, Leo Bretholz had been on the run in war-time Europe, journeying perilously through Austria, Luxembourg, Belgium, Switzerland, Switzerland and to nearly all corners of France. Bretholz barely escaped terrifying ordeals, such as running from Gendarmes ( French police); digging his way through a barbed fence, fleeing an inhumane internment camp; hiding in confined spaces in the homes of generous relatives and sympathizers; beaten to a pulp by a prison guard; and, finally, the most dramatic of all, narrowly weeding his way through a small window on the No. 42 freight train heading to Auschwitz. Flipping through pages, one will feel like they are standing juxtapose to Leo, sensing his emotions, feeling his pains, the stress of his worries, anguish, and the unsuring possiblilty of living to see another day. But, it does not end there; readers will get a surprise revelation about Leo's past not expected. This book will take readers back a century and enter into a continent that was a far contrast than what we know of It today. A time where hatred of another creed was at an extreme. Read and learn first hand from a man-who through it all--survived, and lived to tell his story. I was filled enlightened from concluding this book.

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