

more about her meals and to grow what ingredients she can herself. "I have no delusions about my dependence on the larger food system," she writes. But she remains "troubled by a nagging awareness that much of my food depends on distant, unknowable farms and cheap petroleum."

When I baked my "independent & farmer owned" pumpkin into a pie, the resulting dessert was stringy and tasteless. But I felt good about eating it. I wonder, after reading *Kitchen Literacy*, if I am much different from my grandmother. She opened cans of processed, residue-laden pumpkin and felt good about her predictable pies because the labels promised garden freshness. I open an indie pumpkin and feel good about the parlous results because the label promises sustainable human happiness. We differ mainly in our reading tastes.

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History Writ Small

Reviewed by Aviya Kushner

FOR ONE MONTH IN 1936, my grandfather worked in a bar in Bremen, Germany. The owner of that bar, who was not Jewish, risked plenty to pay my teenage grandfather for drying glasses and sweeping the floor. Decades later, he did my grandfather another favor, telling a committee in Bremen, "Yes, I knew Zigmund Traum. He worked for me in my bar. On this and this date." Because of that testimony, my grandfather received reparation checks for the rest of his life. The money could not compensate for the murders of two parents and four brothers, but it was an acknowledgment of what had happened.

Such small episodes—my grandfather's month of illegal work, the bar owner's walk to the reparation committee's headquarters—are part of the Holocaust's history, too. In *Good*

**GOOD NEIGHBORS,
BAD TIMES:**
Echoes of
My Father's
German Village.

By Mimi Schwartz.
Univ. of Nebraska Press.
279 pp. \$24.95

Neighbors, Bad Times, Mimi Schwartz tells the stories "that history has no time for as it paints the broad brush strokes of the past." These stories take place in Benheim (Schwartz changed the name), the German farming community where her father was born in 1898, when half the town's 1,200 residents were Jewish.

After he emigrated to Queens in 1937, Schwartz's father insisted that once his hometown "was the best place for Jews!" At the same time, he spent hours on the phone persuading others to help him in efforts to assist Jews still stuck in Hitler's Germany to leave, and fast. Schwartz, a professor emerita of the writing program at Richard Stockton College in New Jersey, takes us into the kitchens and gathering places of Germans and Jews alike, accepting drinks, cakes, and stories, in an effort to separate truth from lies in her father's account of good neighbors in a German village.

A hand-typed article by her father that she discovers tucked in an old file after his death describes life in the village before Hitler, when it was common practice for neighbors to help each other with feeding the chickens, milking the cows, and stoking coal. Orthodox Jewish residents who commuted by train to Pforzheim regularly converted one car into a prayer car, Schwartz's father wrote, "much to the astonishment of Christian travelers. No one shied away from laying tefillin [leather boxes Orthodox men strap on their arms and heads during morning prayers]; one prayed as if one were in a synagogue."

But as the Nazis' power grew during the 1930s, many Benheim Jews fled. After her father's death, Schwartz seeks them out to learn what happened in the place they left behind. In Israel, she hears about Benheim Christians who rescued a Torah during Kristallnacht in 1938. From survivors in Vermont, she learns that there

A Jewish daughter tells stories of Benheim, the German farming village where her father was born in 1898.

are actually two extant Benheim Torahs. And she hears stories that confirm that brave acts by non-Jews weren't confined to her father's village. One Benheim survivor, a woman named Ilse Loew, tells Schwartz about a woman from Holland she met recently who had hidden Jews during the war: "One day someone knocked on her door—it was either the Dutch police or a Nazi—and demanded she hand over the Jews. She offered him a cup of coffee and while he drank, she got a gun and killed him." An undertaker friend stowed the body in a coffin with another corpse.

But good neighbors are not the whole story, either. There were many seemingly nice local ladies who moved into vacant Jewish homes and live there still, tending flowers. Gradually, Schwartz pieces together the story of who let who hide whom. The pharmacist who initially sheltered Loew and her future husband during Kristallnacht soon sent them out into the streets, where Nazi thugs roamed. Benheim men sent to Dachau all returned in March 1939—thin, but alive. Most sent to concentration camps later did not return. Of the 89 Benheimers who were deported in 1940–41, 87 were murdered.

Those who read widely in the crowded field of Holocaust studies will find some facets of this book familiar. Like Daniel Mendelsohn, author of *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (2006), Schwartz goes to elderly neighbors and relatives, and finally travels thousands of miles, to hear the stories she was "allergic to" as a kid. These stories may be less reliable than historical data, she admits, but "I liked how one person's memory bumped another, muddying the moral waters of easy judgment." This book of moments and little stories surprises and horrifies, soothes and disturbs. But it is, above all, a beautiful read by a charming writer. And it reminds us that behind every story is the flawed human being who told it.

AVIYA KUSHNER is the author of the forthcoming book *And There Was Evening, And There Was Morning*, about the experience of reading the Bible in English for the first time after a lifetime of reading it in Hebrew.

ARTS & LETTERS

Organization Man

Reviewed by Barbara Wallraff

WE OWE A GREATER DEBT TO mental illness than is commonly recognized. An inmate in an asylum for the criminally insane made important contributions to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

The eminent lexicographer Samuel Johnson exhibited "odd

compulsions, such as pausing to touch every lamp-post as he walked down Fleet Street," as Joshua Kendall mentions in *The Man Who Made Lists*. The subject of Kendall's biography, Peter Mark Roget, exhibited obsessive-compulsive behavior more than a century before his diagnosis was coined. Evidently, people with mental illness are gravely at risk for compiling language-reference books.

Not that Roget (pronounced ro-zhay) thought of his 1852 *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* as anything so modest. His ambition was to classify all knowledge. His wasn't the first book of English synonyms—that was published in 1766 by one John Trusler—but it was original in that it listed the user's options without commentary or editorializing. An English physician and scientist born in 1779, Roget lived in an age when much science consisted of classifying and taxonomizing—plants, animals, "electrical bodies," human intellectual faculties, and so forth. Kendall writes,

Just as his hero, the 18th-century naturalist Carl Linnaeus, divided animals into six classes, Roget divvied up his one thousand concepts as follows:

- I. Abstract Relations
- II. Space
- III. Matter
- IV. Intellect
- V. Volition
- VI. Affections

That outline for the thesaurus, together with the range of Roget's accomplishments, might lead one

THE MAN WHO MADE LISTS:

Love, Death, Madness, and the Creation of Roget's Thesaurus.

By Joshua Kendall.
Putnam. 297 pp. \$25.95