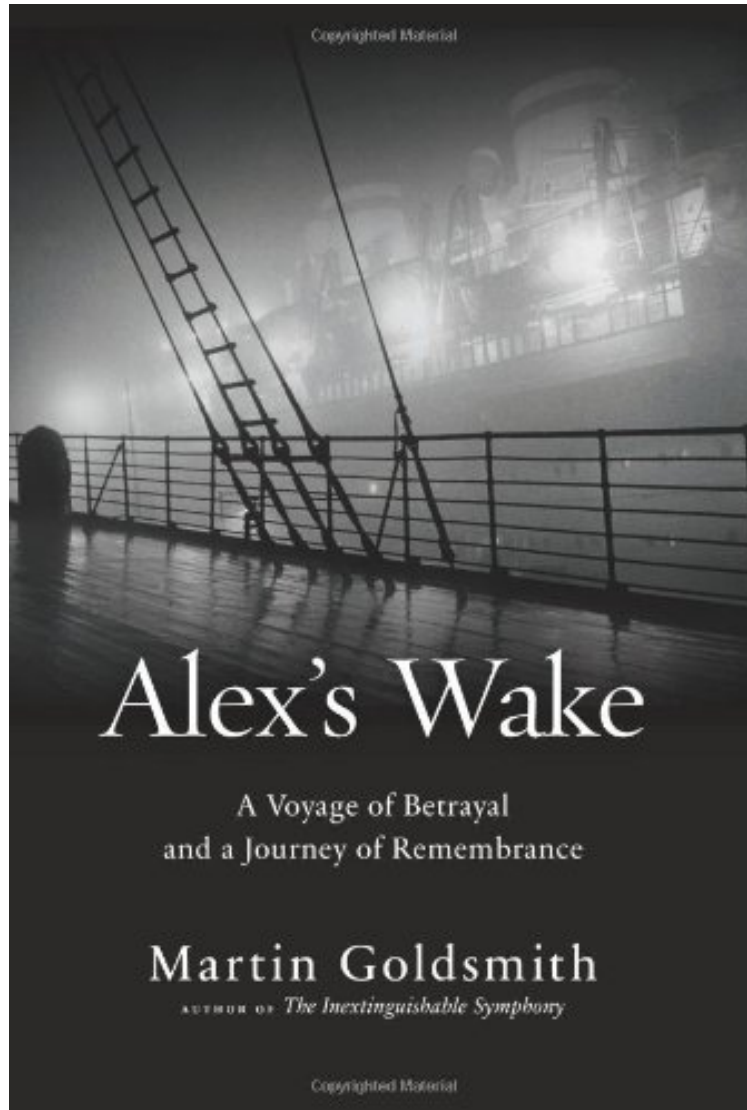


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Alex's Wake: A Voyage of Betrayal and a Journey of Remembrance

Martin Goldsmith

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Martin Goldsmith : Alex's Wake: A Voyage of Betrayal and a Journey of Remembrance before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Alex's Wake: A Voyage of Betrayal and a Journey of Remembrance:

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. A Powerful and Well-Told Story of Tragedy and "Inherited Guilt" By GSH in DC Shortly after publication of his first book, *The Inextinguishable Symphony: A True Story of Music and Love in Nazi Germany* Martin Goldsmith received a telephone call from Nobel laureate, author, and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. Offering high praise for the book, Wiesel urged Goldsmith to continue to share his

talents and begin soon to write his next book. As a reader, I'm grateful that he took that advice. In "The Inextinguishable Symphony," Goldsmith told his parents' "story of music and love" as musicians in Nazi Germany. That story had a happy "ending," beginning with Gnther and Rosemary Goldsmith's emigration to the United States in 1941. In contrast, "Alex's Wake" - the wartime saga of Gnther's own father (Alex) and brother (Klaus Helmut) - ends tragically. It is no spoiler to reveal (as the book jacket does) that Alex and Helmut's awful two-year journey ended in Auschwitz in August 1942. Martin Goldsmith is a gifted storyteller with a talent for beautiful, evocative language. If you're familiar with his warm, resonant voice when hosting classical music programs on NPR or Sirius XM, it's easy to hear that voice while reading his story. (Of course, you don't have to just imagine it if you buy the CD or audiobook, which he narrates, rather than the book itself.) In "Alex's Wake," Goldsmith retraces his grandfather's and uncle's steps and tells their horrific story. He does so not only to share the lessons of a shameful history (in which both France and the U.S. were complicit) but also, more personally, to try to deal in some way with the revelation that his own father failed to do all he could to rescue Alex and Helmut from their fate. Although recognizing the irrationality of carrying such "inherited guilt" - after all, Goldsmith was born 10 years after his grandfather and uncle were murdered - he nonetheless felt compelled to try "to save them." And, he says, "If I couldn't save them, the least I could do was to place flowers on their graves, to tell the world their story, and to bear witness." In "Alex's Wake," Goldsmith does bear witness - powerfully, movingly, and with unflinching honesty. The book first introduces us to Alex and Helmut, two solid German citizens. Indeed, Alex had fought in the trenches of World War I on behalf of the Reich and received the Iron Cross; and he later owned a successful and popular clothing store in Oldenburg. But then came the rise of National Socialism, Kristallnacht (during which Alex was arrested and then imprisoned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp), and the beginning of Jews' "scramble to flee" Germany. Based on painstaking research, including in German and French archives, the book follows Alex's and Helmut's journey first aboard the ill-fated SS St. Louis from Hamburg, Germany to Havana, Cuba, where they expected to start new lives, grateful for having escaped the Nazis. But, with remarkable indifference, Cuba, the U.S., and Canada all turned the refugees away and forced the St. Louis to return to Europe. Alex and Helmut could have chosen to disembark in England but they decided instead on France. Had they only known that France would soon become "Vichy France," with its own network of thousands of camps for Jews and other "undesirables," they would no doubt have opted for England. They were initially welcomed in France with open arms, but in a very short time, Alex and Helmut "metamorphosed ... from displaced persons ... to enemy aliens." Interspersing his relatives' 1939-41 "voyage of betrayal" with his (and his wife, Amy's) own 2011 "journey of remembrance" across Europe, Goldsmith tells of Alex and Helmut's increasingly harsh experiences in one French concentration camp after another. He quotes at length from their remarkable letters, including their increasingly desperate pleas to Gnther to help save their lives. And even though the reader, like Goldsmith himself, fully understands that that isn't going to happen, his powerful narrative compels us to share his irrational hope that the story might somehow have a different ending. The exceptionally moving coda of "Alex's Wake" retells Goldsmith's return, in September 2012, to his grandfather's beautiful home in Oldenburg, Germany. Confiscated by the Nazis, the home is now owned by a couple who were unaware of its shameful history but who now offer a gesture of remembrance and reconciliation. Although initially ambivalent about their offer, Goldsmith comes to terms both with it and, more importantly, with his own "inherited guilt and shame." As I read the final pages of this book, I found myself, oddly, both smiling and crying. "Alex's Wake" is both intelligent and emotional, both broadly historical and intensely personal, both horrific and life-affirming, both educational and enormously satisfying. It deserves a broad audience. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A Wonderful Book of Pain and Untimely Peace By Antonia Don't read this book if you don't want to be horrified. While Nazi atrocities are well documented and never fail to produce horror when discussed, personal familial stories are not well documented. Martin Goldsmith draws you into this book immediately, and it's impossible to put it down until the book is finished. You get to know his family and live this with them. Rather than have me describe Mr. Goldsmith's style, I suggest you click on both Inextinguishable Symphony and Alex's Wake on and read his prefaces. You will know what I mean; you'll be captivated and want to buy the book. While you're at it, buy both books. You won't be sorry. The important aspect of this book is the well-researched and well-documented presentation of the effects of the Holocaust on Mr. Goldsmith's family and particularly on him. This is one story out of millions of untold stories. The seeming "ordinariness" of the cited familial atrocities to millions of people, particularly the Jews, is what makes this book both compelling reading and horrifying at the same time. I read it in two days, not being able to leave it alone, and yet dreading what I knew was the inevitable outcome of his journey. He shares it most personally, and that is what makes it so compelling and yet painful. After such a journey for Mr. Goldsmith, he also shares his liberation from the guilt of having done nothing where he could have done nothing, while questioning his father's inactivity, where he could possibly have done something. While the final chapter does not make the horror go away--you will think of this book for days and days after--it is cathartic in that Mr. Goldsmith finds peace. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An Extraordinary Achievement By Mockingbird Previous reviewers have written very eloquently about this great book, and I will try not repeat their comments. But I want to add my voice to those who have found it so moving, challenging, and strangely comforting. There are many excellent works by and about Holocaust survivors; this is the story of a family member of Holocaust

victims, gone before he was born, and a lifelong struggle to answer the questions and deal with "inherited guilt." Readers of *The Inextinguishable Symphony* will know the story of Martin Goldsmith's parents, and the role of music in their escape from Nazi Germany. Music moves to the background here, but his astounding knowledge and appreciation of Western music (familiar to public and satellite radio listeners) provides background and depth to the telling of the journey, and the great German musical tradition juxtaposed against the horrors of the Nazi era is one of several rich, tragic ironies of this story. This book is also great travel writing, as well as a fascinating history of some lesser known chapters of the Holocaust (especially the plight of Jews and other prisoners trapped in occupied France), but the most distinctive feature is the author's merciless and courage in sharing many of his most intimate thoughts and feelings as he follows in the path of his uncle and grandfather. No earnest reader could be unmoved by this unsparing account of personal struggle to come to terms with cataclysmic events and do justice to family members he never met. Beautifully written, informative yet passionate, this is a book that will sadden, anger, and at times horrify, but through all this will reward and gratify the reader in many ways. It is a fitting tribute to victims and to those who seek to know and honor them.

A tale of two journeys...On May 13, 1939, the luxury liner SS *St. Louis* sailed away from Hamburg, Germany, bound for Havana, Cuba. On board were more than 900 Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany. But an indifferent world conspired against them. After being denied landing rights in Havana, the refugees were turned away by the United States and Canada and forced to sail back to Europe, where the gathering storm of the Holocaust awaited them. Two of those refugees were Alex Goldschmidt, a sixty-year-old veteran of World War I, and his seventeen-year-old son Klaus Helmut Goldschmidt. After their trans-Atlantic voyage, they landed in France. They would spend the next three years in one French camp after another before being shipped to Auschwitz in 1942. Sixty-nine years later, Martin Goldsmith, Alex's grandson and Helmut's nephew, retraced their sad journey. Beginning in lower Saxony where Alex was born, Martin spent six weeks on the road and covered more than 5,700 miles, setting foot on the earth Alex and Helmut trod during their final days. *Alex's Wake* is Martin's eyewitness report. The book offers a compelling history of the voyage of the *St. Louis*, including testimony from those on board, a tale of espionage, and the brave resolve of Captain Gustav Schroeder. It also offers a harrowing chronicle of the vast network of camps in France, many of which were organized by the French themselves with little or no encouragement from the Germans. But *Alex's Wake* is also a contemporary travelogue and a heartfelt memoir of a second-generation American Jew trying to make sense of his heritage and to escape the burden of guilt and fear he long thought was his sole inheritance. Setting forth with the irrational, impossible desire to save two members of his family who were murdered ten years before he was born, Goldsmith concludes his journey by coming home to a moving symbol of remembrance at one of the scenes of the crime.

Advance praise for *Alex's Wake*"Martin Goldsmith re-traveled the route of his grandfather and uncle, both lost to the Holocaust, through their internment in France to their horrid deaths at Auschwitz. He found therein a kind of personal deliverance from the guilt that clings so nastily to the survivor. The opposite of love, Elie Wiesel has observed, is not hate but indifference. With *Alex's Wake*, the author proves himself the least indifferent and, because of that, the most loving of men."Chris Matthews, host of MSNBC's *Hardball* and author of *Tip and the Gipper: When Politics Worked*"*Alex's Wake* is beautiful and brave. Martin Goldsmith's search for the truth is at once a chilling yet affirming account of human loss and recovery."David Maraniss, author of *They Marched into Sunlight*"There are six million Holocaust stories. All of them are the same in sadness and devastation. Each is different in circumstance and fear. Martin Goldsmith eloquently tells the story of his search for family in the rubble of memory and distance. It's a moving journey of finding the past and his own determined and compassionate present."Susan Stamberg, National Public Radio