



SERVING HITLER WITH A WOODEN GUN

A Thousand Shall Fall. By Susi Hasel Mundy.
Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2001.

Reviewed by Janet S. Borisevich

Mention the name Hasel in Adventist circles and most people think of Gerhard Hasel, the former dean of the seminary at Andrews University and author of fourteen books. But it is his sister, Susi, who has written the best seller *A Thousand Shall Fall*, released early in 2001 and already into its third printing.

This story of the Hasels, a German family, during World War II could serve as a corresponding bookend to Desmond Doss's American story, *The Unlikeliest Hero*. Both books are page-turning accounts of Seventh-day Adventists who remained loyal to their faith, their families, and their respective countries during World War II. Mundy's depictions of her father's and mother's respective journeys in their day-to-day lives during the war provide ample evidence of God's direct guidance and intervention.

Miracle after miracle occurs in the pages of the book, as well as in Mundy's account of how the writing of the book occurred. In 1970, after telling her family's story many times, Mundy decided to put an account on paper. The next year, while visiting her parents in Germany, she began collecting their memories both in writing and on tape, reading books about the Hitler era, and preparing to write. But every time she tried

to write, she couldn't.

By 1998, Mundy had collected and read all she could for her story, so she sat down to write, but, once again, writer's block plagued her. She was convinced that someone else should do the writing. One Sabbath morning soon after, she heard that the editor of the *Adventist Review* was visiting her church, so she decided to talk to him. Remarkably, that very morning this editor had prayed that somehow he would find someone to write the story Mundy had been hoping to write! Amazed when Mundy approached him with her idea for a book, he knew he had received the answer to his prayer. "We want the book!" was his immediate response.

Mundy was under pressure to write. Still, nothing she did worked. After asking several experienced authors—who were all too busy to take on another project—she contacted Pastor Maylan Schurch, who had authored or coauthored at least a dozen

books. After Mundy met and discussed the book with Schurch, he told her that she was still the one to write the book but that he would be happy to look it over after she was done. He told her simply to write the story in the third person and to include as many sensory details as possible.

Schurch's advice not to worry about style freed Mundy from the writer's block that had beset her previously, and suddenly she was writing smoothly and effortlessly. After about six months, Mundy completed writing her book, which she sent to Schurch. What surprised her was that he changed almost nothing, except for a few minor adjustments here and there. The value of Schurch's initial guidance, along with his encouragement throughout that half-year period of writing, inspired her to accomplish something she never dreamed she could do.

Mundy uses lively dialog to recreate her family's experiences. "The Bible is all lies! God doesn't protect us. . . . He doesn't care what happens to us. We might as well not pray any more." These words spill from seven-year-old Gerhard Hasel, who has believed that God will protect his family and other believers from harm, until, one day, most of the Adventists in

Darmstadt are killed in a bombing raid. His mother, Helene, replies, "You have learned an important lesson today. Pain and tragedy can come to anybody, good and bad alike. The important thing is to believe that God loves us no matter what happens. As long as we are His children, it doesn't matter if we live or die because in the end, we will live with Him in heaven."

"Please be with us, Father. . . . Help me to be true to my faith, even in the army. Help me so that I will not have to kill anyone." This is the prayer of Franz Hasel, the forty-year-old literature evangelist who departs from his wife and three children at the start of World War II. Although a pacifist, Franz is drafted and about to enter into the world of Hitler's prestigious Company 699, assigned the task of building bridges each time Hitler made his next move. The concepts



Helen Hasel before the war.

mentioned in his prayer—believing in God's presence on a personal level, being true to one's faith no matter what, being determined not to kill, and trusting that both self and family will be kept safe—all reveal the major themes of this stirring story of unflinching courage and spiritual fortitude.

Although suspected of being a disguised Jew because of his

Sabbath-keeping and refusal to consume pork, Franz is somehow always able to follow his principles. In spite of often being called "carrot eater" and "Bible reader" by his superiors and some of his comrades, he soon earns the Maltese Cross because of his "good moral influence on the men in the entire company." Franz is promoted, receiving new and unexpected benefits, such as being relieved of all outdoor work in the cold.

Having natural marksmanship skills, Franz does not trust himself with a weapon. As a way of showing God that he is serious about not wanting to kill any human, he disposes of his revolver and arms himself with a piece of wood camouflaged as a gun, putting his life totally in God's hands. His sergeant notices that he is the only man in their company who does not get so much as a scratch or a bruise. The bullets always seem to miss Franz. His sergeant declares, "From now on, you and I will share the same quarters! You are going to be my guardian angel!"

Mundy also describes scenes from a child's perspective: what it was like for her and her siblings to endure sudden Nazi inspections, shattering air raids, and desperate escapes from their home, all of which stole a portion of their childhood and quickened their years of growing up.

Throughout the book, explicit illustrations are given of how war often brings out the worst or the best in people. Just after the war, Franz tells one of his former oppressive officers, "Because of my Christian beliefs, you have wanted to do away with me all during the war. Now those same Christian beliefs are going to be your salvation because I am not going to turn you in for war crimes."

Miracle after miracle is described



Helen Hasel after the war.

from beginning to end. At the end of the war, when they return to their city of Frankfurt, the Hasels discover that their home is still standing amidst the destruction. Also, of the original 1,200 in Company 699, only seven survive—three of whom were not wounded; Franz Hasel, the man with the wooden pistol, is one of these three.

Mundy declares that the experience of writing *A Thousand Shall Fall* has given her a new sense of awe in witnessing firsthand how God works. It has also taught her how to commit herself totally to God, which has given her great satisfaction and peace in knowing that God has allowed her to contribute to the publishing work in a way that she initially did not expect. It is clear to Mundy that God in his great wisdom knew that the timing of her book was not meant to be written in those earlier years. It is a book for "such a time as this."

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