A Faraway Island

Pat Frade

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Reviewer: Pat Frade
Reading Level: Young Adult
Rating: Outstanding
Genre: Historical fiction;
Subject: World War, 1939-1945--Refugees--Juvenile fiction.; Jews--Sweden--Juvenile fiction;
Sisters--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Stephie (age 12) and Nellie (age 7) have lived a comfortable life with their parents in Vienna. To escape the Nazis, the girls are sent to a rugged island off the coast of Sweden, where they expect to stay until their parents can leave Austria. The girls have separate host families. Nellie's host family has several children, so Nellie settles in easily and quickly begins learning Swedish. Stephie's host family is a couple without children. The husband is away fishing most of the time, and the wife is very strict and cold. Stephie experiences loneliness and isolation and has a hard time making friends at school. She eventually perseveres against the challenges of making friends, learning Swedish, and hoping her parents will arrive soon. As the war comes closer (to Denmark and Norway), details of their life in Vienna are revealed and an understanding of the fear they have for the Nazis is better understood.

This book is based on interviews with Jewish refugees in wartime Sweden. In 1939, five hundred Jewish children were sent to safety in Sweden and had various experiences living with Swedish families. This is an excellent book for teens to read about Holocaust historical fiction and about refugee children, the meaning of identity, and the joys and sorrows of growing up. This is the first book of four novels about the sisters. A Faraway Island won the 2010 Mildred L. Batchelder Award and was both an American Library Association Notable Book and Sydney Taylor Honor Book for Older Readers.

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