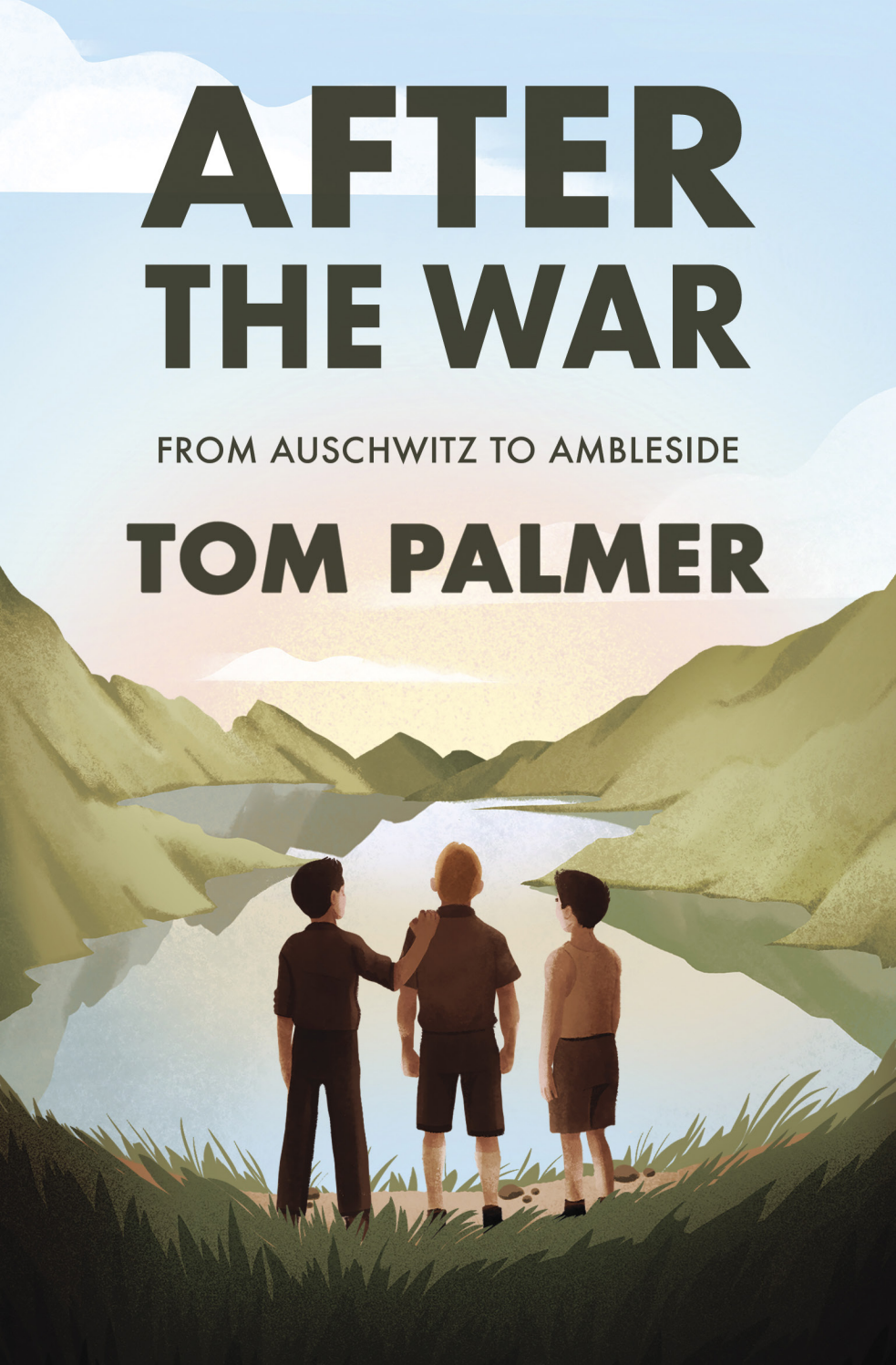
AFTER THE WAR

FROM AUSCHWITZ TO AMBLESIDE

TOM PALMER



AFTER THE WAR

TOM PALMER

Sonkers

First published in 2020 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2020 Tom Palmer
Illustration © 2020 Violet Tobacco

All photographs reproduced by
permission of Another Space LDHP

The moral right of Tom Palmer and Violet Tobacco
to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has
been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the
written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-948-7

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

This book is dedicated to the Lake District Holocaust Project for the work that they do to share the story of the Windermere Boys

FOREWORD

A group of young people arrived in the Lake District in the summer of 1945 and stayed for a few months, the last of them leaving in early 1946. Although they only spent a short time in the area, it was a profoundly important experience for them, and they made a big impression on those who met them at the time.

In 2005 I became intrigued by references that were made to these youngsters, and when I began to investigate, a truly remarkable story emerged.

People I spoke to initially in the immediate area had different opinions as to who these children had been. They were variously described as being part of the Kindertransport, children on holiday

from London, German prisoners of war, and in one case they were thought to have been children from Holland escaping famine. All these suggestions turned out to have some basis in fact but almost all had missed the crucial point.

The young people were in fact Jewish child survivors of the Holocaust and, moreover, they had arrived in the Lake District directly from the concentration camps.

To say that I was astonished would be an understatement.

Talking to these Jewish children many years later, and to more and more local people, I began to compile recollections, often handed down from parents and grandparents, that painted a picture of both human compassion and also the ability of people to recover from even the most horrendous experiences. These memories became the basis for the Lake District Holocaust Project, established in 2013.

When Tom Palmer approached me to ask if he could write a book about the Jewish children and their stay in the Lake District, I was immediately taken by his desire to totally immerse himself in the story. We worked with him on this extraordinary book project and he was always full of the same compassion as those who helped the children in their early days of recovery.

He was also utterly dedicated to doing the story justice, and I am sure you will see that he has. It is a story from the past, told in the present, with lessons for us all for the future.

Trevor Avery BEM

Lake District Holocaust Projec

Photograph on previous page: Some of the children on a boat trip on Windermere.

ONE

Even though he was afraid, Yossi forced himself to crawl to the window in the side of the aeroplane. There were no seats, so he had to crouch and stay on all fours as he and the other passengers were thrown about by the turbulence.

Outside he could see a wall of white and a wing wobbling so hard it looked like it might fall off.

Behind him, Yossi heard children cry out, the sound of at least one person being sick. And some laughter too.

"Come and sit down here, Yossi," a woman's voice called out.

Yossi did as he was told, scrambling along the floor of the Stirling bomber to rejoin the other children and adults sitting on blankets.

Yossi loved aeroplanes. He should have been scared of them, as the first time he'd seen one, six years ago at the beginning of the war, a German bomber had tried to destroy his home town in Poland. Then, over the following years, he'd seen bombs falling from British and American aeroplanes, targeting the factories where he was forced to work.

But he still loved them, perhaps because aeroplanes were a sign that change was coming. And once he was in the concentration camps, Yossi was desperate for change. He was also fascinated by these powerful machines. How could a huge piece of metal with all these people on board take off and then land without breaking into pieces?

He glanced at the faces of the two boys closest to him. Didn't it worry them?

The boys in question were called Mordecai and Leo. Both of them were fifteen years old, like Yossi. And both seemed to be focusing so hard on what they were doing that they were barely aware of bouncing around in the clouds.

Mordecai, short with dark hair, was reading an English book. Yossi admired him so much because he could hold a conversation in German, Russian, Czech and Polish. He also admired that Mordecai could concentrate on reading even now as they hurtled towards the ground.

Tall blond-haired Leo was busy too. For most of the flight he had been trying to get at a spool of wire that was jammed down the side of the fuselage. Yossi knew that Leo would plan to use the wire or

trade it with someone. He was always on the lookout for any opportunity.

Now the plane lunged suddenly to the left and some of the children called out in fear. Yossi dragged himself to the window again to look out. Squinting in the bright light, he could see a range of mountains ahead, blue sparkling water beyond and miles and miles of green fields. They were out of the clouds.

Over England.

This was the place where they had been told they would be safe. A place where there would be no German soldiers and no concentration camps.

The only thing that Yossi knew about England was a distant memory of his father's bicycle. It was very special. So special that the tyres needed to be imported from another country. On the tyres – moulded into the rubber – were the words "MADE IN ENGLAND".

"What can you see out of the window?" Leo asked Yossi. "What does it look like?"

"I see Paradise," Yossi replied.

"Tell us more," Talia said. Talia was a young Polish woman who had come to take the children from a concentration camp in Europe to England and refuge. Yossi understood why she was asking. Talia wanted him to reassure this group of children who had spent the last six years terrified of what would happen to them next.

"It is beautiful," Yossi told the other children, turning to smile at them. "There are fields and roads and small villages. Just like back home in Poland ..."

Yossi stopped speaking once he saw some of the children frown at the mention of their homeland.

"But this is England," Yossi said quickly. "They're going to feed us. They're going to give us clothes. We'll be safe. Won't we, Talia?"

Talia nodded.

"What if it's not like that?" Mordecai asked Yossi quietly, once they were sat together again.

"It *will* be like that, Mordi." But Yossi's words were lost as the plane's engines began to roar ever louder and he felt a rush of fear.

The aeroplane was about to land.

Was England a nice place? *Would* it be safe?

"How do we know?" Mordecai asked again, his voice tense.