

# A Nazi-hunter's children's story

By MARILYN AUGUST

He might have grown up to be an artist or a writer, or perhaps a dentist, like his father. But Georges Halpem never got the chance. Instead, he and 43 other Jewish children were wrenched from the safety of a French orphanage outside Lyons and sent to Auschwitz, where they all perished.

*Georgy: One of the 44 Children of Izieu*, a new book by noted Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld, pulls the eight-year-old Holocaust victim out of darkness and oblivion.

"It's an attempt to put a human face on a statistic," Klarsfeld said. "Georgy symbolizes each of the 11,500 Jewish children who were arrested in France and deported to death camps." About 75,000 Jews were shipped to Auschwitz from France during World War II. Only 2,500 returned.

Published this spring on the 53rd anniversary of Georgy's arrest at Izieu on April 6, 1944 — two months before the Allied D-Day landing in Normandy — this slim volume could almost be mistaken for a bedtime story. Besides an oversized format common to many children's books, there are drawings galore, such as handsome ships that Georgy decked with big, colorful French flags. On the cover is Georgy's depiction of the orphanage's two stone buildings and its peaceful rural setting where the children — aged three to 16 — played and studied, awaiting their parents' return. Only Georgy's parents, Maurice and Serafina Halpern, and two other mothers did return.

Izieu was one of many Jewish orphanages established throughout France where parents had been deported or who were in hiding. In the days of dawn police raids, Jew-hunting militia squads, and denunciations by neighbors, families with children had more difficulty assuming false identities and believed their offspring would be safer in orphanages.

The book includes affectionate letters Georgy wrote to his parents in which he describes life at Izieu — holiday desserts of chocolate and spice bread — and his belief that the war would end soon. *Georgy* also reads like the Halpem family photograph album: Georgy lounging on a chair, riding a bike,

swimming, showing off a pair of new boots, posing with his proud parents who would later give Klarsfeld the material for the book. They are excruciatingly painful reminders of a life cut short by Hitler's Final Solution.

"Georgy was the happiest child at Izieu," Klarsfeld said. "He was the only one whose parents had not yet been deported." The Halperns never got over their loss and sent out missing-person notices as late as 1982. Both died in 1989.

Like all his publications devoted to Holocaust victims, Klarsfeld wrote *Georgy* as a reference book. In fact, it contains reproductions of the original documents that allowed him to piece together the truth behind the Izieu tragedy: police

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files and hand-written administrative lists of departure and arrival dates at Drancy — the French-run transit camp outside Paris and last stop before the gas chambers.

*Georgy* also features the "smoking gun" telegram from Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie in which he confirmed the "success" of an early piece of evidence, which Klarsfeld dug up from German archives, clinched Barbie's conviction for crimes against humanity in 1987. In addition, *Georgy* contains the final legal arguments Klarsfeld presented at the Barbie trial and recaps his decades-long struggle to extradite the "Butcher of Lyons." Barbie had been living comfortably in Bolivia until Klarsfeld and his wife, Beate, tracked him down.

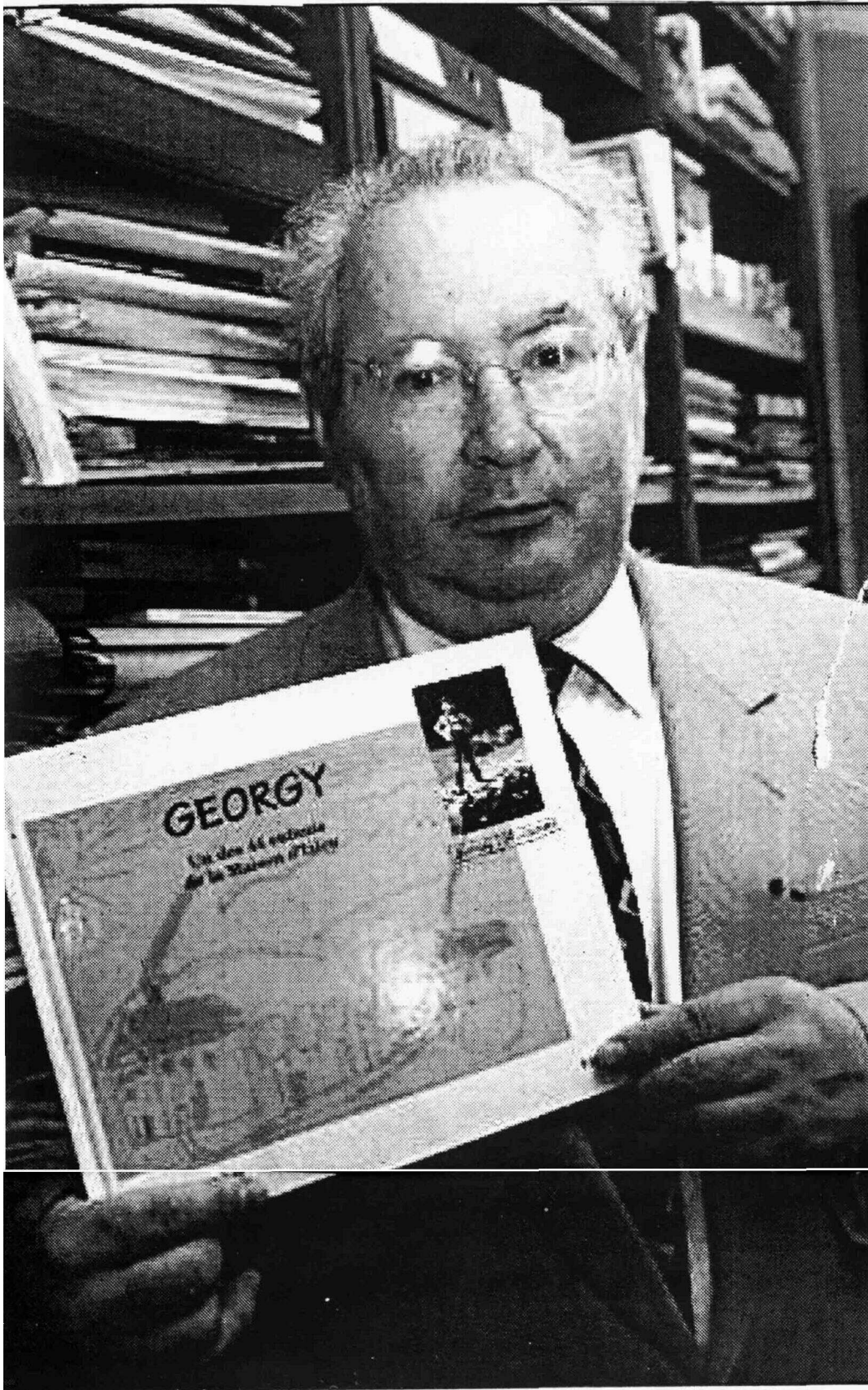
"*Georgy* is a children's book that is also for adults," Klarsfeld said. "How else can you get across the idea that six million is, in fact, one plus one plus one plus one...?"

Klarsfeld chose Georges Halpem

to symbolize all the young victims of the Holocaust because he had the most information about the boy's life, thanks to regular correspondence with the Halperns, who settled in Israel after the war.

Klarsfeld said he identified strongly with Georgy, who was 43 days his junior. Klarsfeld said the two may have crossed paths at another Jewish children's home in 1941. But Klarsfeld was luckier than Georgy; he was reunited with his parents and later survived a police raid by hiding in a false-bottomed closet. His father, however, was arrested and transported to Auschwitz.

"I could have been Georgy. I was supposed to have been," said Klarsfeld. "Collectively speaking, I am Georgy, which is why I wrote this book. I would want myself brought out of the shadows into the light. I would want to be a subject of history, not just a statistic." (AP)



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