Great Holocaust Story

When Max’s dad buys a painting from the window of Willy’s dad’s antique shop, Willy and Max become instant friends. They are just alike, down to their same missing tooth! Even though Max lives in the Jewish quarter, the boys are inseparable—until the Nazis come. They take everything from Max’s family, including the precious painting that began the boys’ friendship. And though they promise to be friends forever, Willy and Max know that something unspeakable is coming between them, and they may never see each other again . . . . Beautiful and heartbreaking, Willy & Max is the powerful story of two boys separated by circumstance, but held together through generations by a simple painting—and the unbreakable spirit of their friendship.

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My Personal Review:
Willy and Max are young boys living in Antwerp, Belgium. Willy’s parents owned an antique shop, where Max’s father purchased a portrait called "The Lady" that seemed to smile at him. From this encounter, Willy and Max become friends. Soon the Nazis invade Belgium and begin confiscating Jewish homes and property. Max and his father stop at the antique shop and ask Willy’s father to hide the portrait as they depart the city. Willy hides it in a statue of an angel. When the Nazis search the antique shop, one decides he likes the angel statue and takes it. Many years later, Willy moved to America. A museum calls to tell him that they found the portrait in the angel with a picture of Willy and Max taped to the back. Willy tracks down Max’s family and find out that Max passed away the previous year, but he gives them "The Lady" and joins them for a Sabbath meal.

This story of friendship is enhanced by beautiful color illustrations that are reminiscent of old world Europe as well as amplify the glow of the Sabbath.
The subject matter is extremely timely, as several agencies are working to return art stolen by the Nazis to its rightful owners. The presentation is a creative way of showing many aspects of the era: interaction between Jews and non-Jews; the Nazis' plunder of property, their harassment of non-Jews who interacted with Jews, and the gradual worsening of conditions for all Europeans as World War II progressed. It effectively portrays the terror and abuse tactics of the Nazis without graphic detail. This book is also a good vehicle for discussing friendships, ethics of property ownership, and children during the Holocaust.

REVIEWED BY KATHE PINCHUCK (Bloomfield Public Library - Bloomfield, NJ)

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