

# Friends To The Rescue

By Ellen Schwartz | Illustrated by Alison Mutton

# READING GUIDE

## About the Book

On April 6, 2009, Luca and his grandfather Roberto were eating lunch together in their quiet home in Fossa, Italy when disaster struck. An earthquake shook the house, forcing them to scramble out into the streets. As wave after wave trembled the ground, Luca watched his home and small village fall to rubble.

With the roads impassable, the village was cut off from the rest of the world. Luca and his neighbors needed to work together to survive. Those who could tended to the wounded, while others scoured the ruins to look for food and water. When rescue workers finally arrived four days later, they brought along surprise visitors.

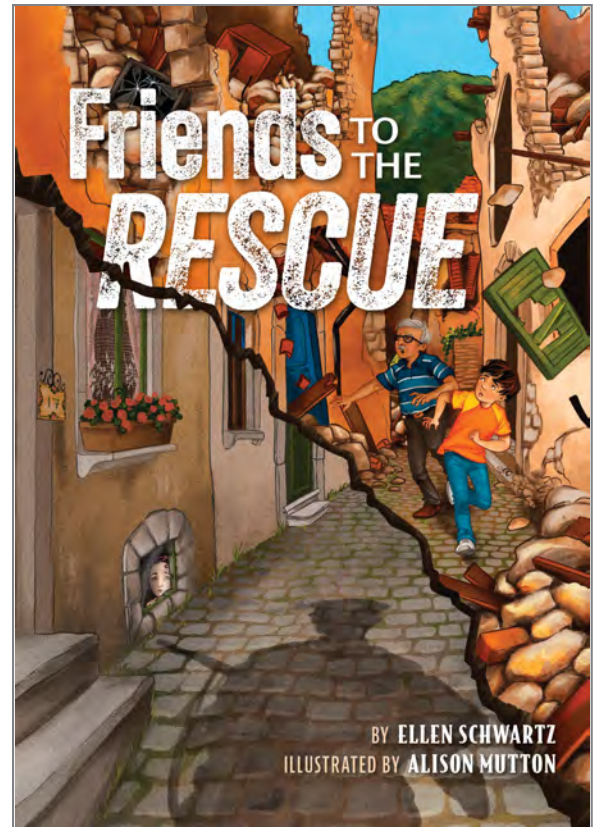
During World War II, Luca's grandfather Roberto, then just a boy, had helped in another type of rescue. Roberto's parents had cleared out their basement pantry and replaced food with beds. They told him there would be visitors who must remain hidden. A family of Jews from Rome moved in, seeking refuge from the German armies that were now in Italy. The family's young daughter Sara and Roberto became the closest of friends but lost touch after the war. It would take an emergency 65 years later to bring them back together.

Hearing Roberto and Sara tell their stories, and seeing them work together to help people in the village, Luca is able to summon his courage to be a good helper and a good friend.

Holocaust survivors are depicted as more than just victims in this historical fiction novel for middle grade readers, inspired by a true story and told in two different time periods. An endnote discusses the real events and includes archival images.

**Ellen Schwartz** is the author of 18 award-winning books for children, a non-fiction book for adults, and a collection of profiles of women singer-songwriters. Ellen's children's books include picture books, middle-grade novels, young adult fiction, and non-fiction books. She lives in Burnaby, British Columbia.

**Alison Mutton** earned a BA with Honors in Design from Curtin University, focusing on illustration. She specializes in children's illustration, including fairytale-style fantasy and historically-inspired illustration. She is based in Perth, Western Australia.



## Key Themes:

Helping Others; Compassion and Empathy; Taking Responsibility for One's Community; Intergenerational Bonds; Appreciating Differences

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Ages 9–11 years

Use these questions to preface and conclude a reading of this book with children. Encourage them to share their observations as you read the book together, and take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

## Before Reading

- Look closely at this book's cover. Why do you think that half of the illustration is in color and half is in black and white?
- What do you think is happening in each half of the illustration? When do you think each half of the illustration takes place? How do you think the two halves might be connected?

## While Reading

- This story goes back and forth between Luca's story in 2009 and his Nonno Roberto's childhood in 1943. What do you notice about how the two stories are connected? How are their stories similar? How are their stories different?
- What do the illustrations tell us about what each character is thinking and feeling? How do you know?
- Throughout the story, we'll meet a few stuffed animals: Theo the rabbit, Tommo the bear, and other stuffed animals that volunteers make for children in the hospital. Why do you think these stuffed animals are so important to Luca, Sara, and Nonno Roberto?

## After Reading

- What fears did Luca have to face after the earthquake? What fears did Nonno Roberto and Sara have to face during the war? What helped them to be brave?
- On p. 52, Luca's Nonno Roberto tells him: "When tough times come, people help out... Sometimes they even become cherished friends." How did Roberto learn to be a good friend to Sara? How does Luca learn to be a good friend to Antonio?
- This book is based on a true story about twenty Jews who returned to Fossa, Italy, after an earthquake to help the people who had protected them during World War II. Think of a time when someone did something big to help you. What did they do? How did that make you feel? How did you show gratitude?
- Think of a time when you helped someone else. What did you do? How did you feel? How did the person respond?

## Optional: Extension Activity

- Write, draw, or tell a story about a time that somebody helped you OR a time when you helped somebody else.
- Ask an older adult in your family or your community to tell you a story about a time that somebody helped them OR a time when they helped somebody else.

*Discussion Questions by Leah Berkowitz*