



## Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot

By Margot Theis Raven



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### Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot By Margot Theis Raven

A True Story of the Berlin Airlift and the Candy that Dropped from the Sky. Life was grim in 1948 West Berlin, Germany. Josef Stalin blockaded all ground routes coming in and out of Berlin to cut off West Berliners from all food and essential supplies. Without outside help, over 2.2 million people would die. Thus began the Berlin Airlift, a humanitarian rescue mission that utilized British and American airplanes and pilots to fly in needed supplies. As one of the American pilots participating in the Airlift mission, Lt. Gail S. Halvorsen helped to provide not only nourishment to the children but also gave them a reason to hope for a better world. From one thoughtful, generous act came a lifelong relationship between Lt. Gail and the children of Berlin. This is the true story of a seven-year-old girl named Mercedes who lived in West Berlin during the Airlift and of the American who came to be known as the Chocolate Pilot. Artist Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen's evocative paintings illuminate Margot Theis Raven's powerful story of hope, friendship and remembrance. About the Author: Margot Theis Raven has been a professional writer working in the fields of radio, television, magazines, newspapers, and children's books for thirty years. She has won five national awards, including an IRA Teacher's Choice award. Ms. Raven earned her degree in English from Rosemont College and attended Villanova University for theater study, and Kent State University for German language. Ms. Raven splits her time living in Concord, MA, Charleston, SC and West Chesterfield, NH. About the Illustrator: Born in the Netherlands, Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in Holland. He immigrated to the United States in 1976, and years later he became a children's book illustrator. Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot is Nick's ninth children's book with Sleeping Bear Press.



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## Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot By Margot Theis Raven Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Van Frankenbuyzen's (*L Is for Lincoln*) opening spread of a bombed-out West Berlin speaks volumes about the necessity of the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift, the setting for this somewhat overwritten tale. During this time, the British and American forces flew food and basic supplies into the city after the Russian blockade cut off all access to it. After a historical note, Raven (*Angels in the Dust*) introduces Mercedes, a likable young West Berliner who tends the white chickens in her yard. One morning, her mother reads her a newspaper article about an American pilot, Lt. Gail Halvorsen, who, when delivering supplies to the city, "rained down sweets" on children waiting by the runway ("They carried flour and clothing and coal too. And something else!" reads the narrative). At the airfield, an older, taller boy snags the chocolate bar headed her way, and Mercedes sends Halvorsen a letter ("When you fly over the garden and see the white chickens, please drop some candy there and all will be ok"). He then mails her a package of treats ("The memory of this day would stay with her for the rest of her life"). Unfortunately, the epilogue is more compelling than the narrative: readers learn that Mercedes met Halvorsen in 1972, and the two remain friends. The close-up portraits may be static, but the artist's lifelike depictions of the devastated city are chilling; bullet and shrapnel holes mar even the girl's garden walls. Despite the cumbersome text, a sketch of an uncommonly giving man and a rare friendship emerges. Ages 5-10.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 3-5-This outstanding picture book depicts one of the lesser-known aspects of the Berlin Airlift following World War II as seen through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl. Operation Little Vittles was run by Lt. Gail Halvorsen who, out of the goodness of his heart, began dropping candy in parachutes made from handkerchiefs to the children of West Berlin. This heartwarming story provides not only the historical context, but an epilogue as well. Although the text is slightly wordy at times, it shows, in part, how the Cold War impacted children, and how one child struggled to find hope amid the ruins of postwar Germany. It is also a tribute to the thousands of people involved in the effort. With views of devastated buildings and shrapnel holes in concrete, the full-color paintings elicit a real sense of the war's devastation.

*Robyn Ryan Vandenbroek, Elgin Court Public School, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 2-5. In 1948, Stalin blockaded Berlin, so for more than a year, British and American planes airlifted tons of food and supplies to the city. An American pilot named Halvorsen also dropped candy and gum in little parachutes to the children of Berlin. They wrote letters to the "Chocolate Pilot." Young Mercedes longs for chocolate, too, but she's worried that the planes overhead are keeping their chickens from laying precious eggs. She gets a reply from the pilot with a package of candy for her very own. A note sets the historical context for this story based on a real-life incident, and an epilogue tells how Mercedes and Halvorsen met many years later. The pictures are handsome and naturalistically rendered; the prose is a bit overwrought, but the story comes through. Although the book is designed as a picture book for older readers, good beginning readers may be able to handle this on their own. *GraceAnne DeCandido*

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**From reader reviews:**

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