

## Once by Morris Gleitzman

**Subjects:** Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Poland—Juvenile fiction; Separation (Psychology)—Fiction; Orphans—Fiction; Survival—Fiction

**Book List:** Europe

**Props:** Large stuffed carrot



His name is Felix, he's Jewish, and once he was living in a Christian orphanage in the mountains and he shouldn't have been and he almost caused a riot. It was because of the carrot. (*Show carrot*) Well the carrot wasn't this big, it was a normal sized carrot, but the trouble it caused was BIG.

You see, Felix decided that the carrot was a sign from his parents. They had sent his favorite vegetable to him to let him know that their problems were over and after three long years and eight long months things had improved for Jewish booksellers. They had sent the carrot to let him know that they would be coming to take him home—at last. Thank you, God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler.

Felix first saw the carrot, floating in his soup. It was huge among the flecks of cabbage and the tiny blobs of pork fat and the few lonely lentils and the bits of gray plaster from the kitchen ceiling. Felix hadn't seen a whole carrot since he had come to the orphanage. Not even the nuns got whole carrots, and they got bigger servings than the kids because they needed the extra energy for being holy.

When he first saw the carrot, he was dizzy with excitement. He stuck his fingers in the soup to grab it. Luckily the other kids were concentrating on their own dinners, spooning their soup up hungrily and peering into their bowls in case there was a speck of meat there, or in case there was a speck of rat poo. If the others had seen his carrot there would have been a jealousy riot.

But no one saw his carrot. The carrot was safe. Felix looked forward to seeing his parents. But he was distracted when a bunch of men in suits with armbands came to the orphanage.

In the courtyard, the head nun, Mother Minka, argued with the men. She waved her arms, which she only did when she's in a very bossy mood. Looking through a window, Felix saw smoke, a bonfire in the courtyard. The men were burning books. Later Mother Minka pulled Felix into the kitchen. "Nazis," she said. "How they knew I had Jewish books here I've no idea. But don't worry. They don't suspect you're Jewish." Felix stared at her. He tried to understand. The Nazis or whatever they were called where burning Jewish books? Felix had a stab of fear for his parents. Did this mean his parents weren't coming to get him?

Felix asked, "When my parents sent the carrot, did they mention when they'd actually be getting here?" Mother Minka looked sadly at Felix for a long time then told him that his parents hadn't sent the carrot. That Sister Elwira had put the carrot in his soup because she had felt sorry for him. Felix looked at Mother Minka, desperately trying to see signs of bread-mold madness in her eyes. It must be that. She would never lie. But then Felix felt as if he was the one with bread-mold madness burning inside him. He shouted, "That's not true." Panic swept over him. His Mum and Dad weren't coming! Felix thought for a moment. He realized there was only one thing to do. If there were thugs going around the country burning Jewish books, he had to try and find his Mum and Dad and tell them what was going on.

Once he escaped from an orphanage to find his Mum and Dad. Once he saved a girl called Zelda from a burning house. Once he made a Nazi with a toothache laugh. Once he jumped from a moving train with Nazis shooting at him. His name is Felix. (*Hold up book*) This is his story.