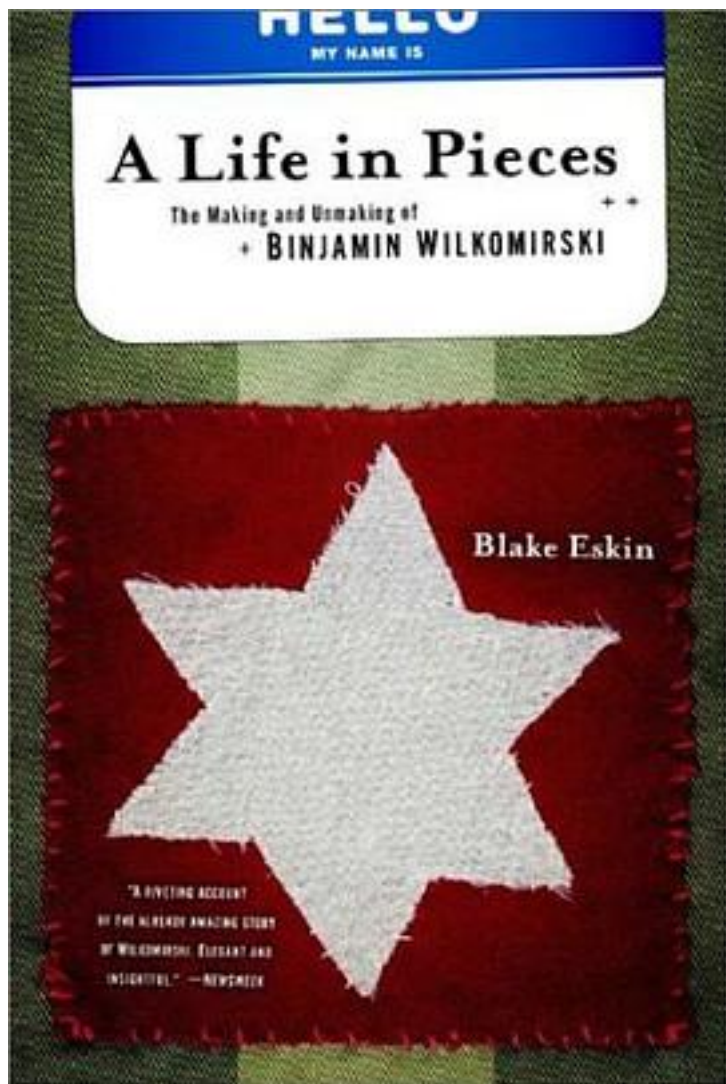


A Life in Pieces



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A searing account of the rise and fall of the author of *Fragments*, told by a descendant of the Wilkomirskis of Riga. In 1997, Benjamin Wilkomirski arrived in New York to read from his prize-winning book *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, his memoir of an early childhood lost to the concentration camps at Majdanek and Auschwitz, and to raise money for the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. This orphaned survivor also came as the guest of honor to the family reunion of the Wilburs (once Wilkomirskis). The Wilburs hoped to trace the unrecorded link between the Wilkomirskis of Riga in Latvia and the name that Benjamin remembered. The Wilburs and the media embraced Benjamin as a humanitarian whose eloquent story typified that of many child survivors.

One year later, however, Benjamin was publicly accused of being a gentile imposter: on August 27, 1998, a German novelist named Daniel Ganzfried announced to the world that he had uncovered documentary evidence proving that *Fragments* was an elaborate fiction. Yet Benjamin still insisted his wartime memories carried more weight than the documents against him, proclaiming, "Nobody has to believe me." Those who continued to believe Benjamin included child survivors, psychotherapists, and his publishers.

Who was Benjamin Wilkomirski? Why would someone want to be him? And why would so many of us want to believe him? Wilbur family member Blake Eskin recounts the dispute over Benjamin's authenticity through reportage, interviews with Benjamin's acquaintances, and a visit to Riga in search of actual Wilkomirski relatives. In his absorbing narrative Eskin records the reactions of the media, the child-survivor community, and the Wilburs themselves to reveal larger disagreements over the reliability of memory, the value of testimony, and the individual's relationship to history.

Part biography, part mystery, and part memoir, Eskin's *A Life in Pieces* is an important and lasting contribution to the literature of the Holocaust. 7 b/w photographs

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