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## Exhibit on Curious George's escape opens

**Long before pedaling himself into mischief, famous monkey took much more harrowing ride when his creators escaped Nazi invasion of France**

Associated Press

Long before he pedaled himself into all sorts of mischief in "[Curious George Rides a Bike](#)," the famous monkey took a much more harrowing ride when his creators escaped the Nazi invasion of France.

The manuscript that would later launch the beloved series of children's books was among the few belongings that Margret and H.A. Rey took with them when they fled Paris in June 1940, two days before German troops marched into the city.

Both German Jews, the husband-and-wife team cobbled together two bikes out of spare parts and peddled south to Orleans. Trains carried them through Spain and Portugal, where they boarded a ship to the United States.

Eighteen years later, the Reys built a summer cottage in New Hampshire, where an exhibit about their wartime escape now is on display at a nonprofit center dedicated to the couple's legacy. To complement the exhibit, which was created by the Institute for Holocaust Education in Nebraska and features illustrations from a 2005 children's book about the Reys' trip, the Margret and H.A. Rey Center plans a series of lectures about the Reys and immigration during World War II. "Kids are drawn in because of George, but they're also inspired by the story because these people were ordinary citizens in a wartime situation," said Louise Borden, author of "The Journey That Saved Curious George." "There's the whole drama of it." Borden, who was surprised that little had been written about the Reys' escape before her book, took a journey of

her own while researching it. She dug through the Reys' papers at the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi, enlisted her high school French teacher in Ohio with help translating, then headed to France, where the Reys arrived for a two-week honeymoon in 1936 and ended up staying four years.



Author Louise Borden. 'Kids inspired by story' (Photo: AP)

After months spent reading Hans' meticulous notes penciled in tiny pocket calendars and viewing black-and-white photos, Borden was surprised by the colorful scenes she found at the chateau where the Reys spent the fall of 1939, vibrant colors that were echoed in Rey's artwork.

"Because I'm following in their footsteps, I feel like I'm kind of a witness to how they were living and the landscape they were living in. Setting and place is always really important in my work. This had just natural, wonderful settings to use," she said.

While living at the chateau, the couple's German accents attracted the attention of the village police. To prove that he wasn't a spy, H.A. Rey led the officer upstairs to his studio and showed him his sketches and watercolor illustrations of "Fifi," the monkey who later would be renamed George. George rescued the couple again when another officer questioned them aboard a train headed to

Spain, then smiled and moved on after thumbing through the manuscript. Though she had read a brief article that said the Reys had bicycled from Paris to the Spanish border, Borden knew that was unlikely given the distance. H.A. Rey's journals confirmed that hunch. "When you look at photographs of the people fleeing, they're not wearing clothes like we wear today. They're not in Nike jogging outfits. These people are not Lance Armstrong. They're women in high heels and flats and skirts, and men with suits and ties. So I figured they must've gotten on a train," she said. The couple arrived in the US in October 1940. "Curious George" was published the next year and went on to sell more than 27 million copies. The Reys became US citizens and settled in New York and later Cambridge, Massachusetts. H.A. Rey died in 1977; Margret lived until 1996.

The Margret and H.A. Rey Center was created five years ago to take over management of the Reys' summer cottage in Waterville Valley, where they were known for rescuing injured animals and entertaining local children. The center offers an arrangement of art, science and nature programs for children and adults inspired by the Reys' spirit of curiosity and discovery. As part of the current exhibit, the center invited those who knew the Reys to share their stories on videotape.

"Everyone knows Curious George, but most people don't know about the Reys, and especially their tale of fleeing Paris and having George with them," said Audrey Eisenhaver, the center's director.

Borden said she has shared the book with schoolchildren around the country and with many adult Jewish community groups. Many readers have thanked her for telling the story, she said.

"That audience didn't know anything about this. They find it remarkable," she said.