



# The Zaddik: The Battle for a Boy's Soul

*Elaine Grudin Denholtz*

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## **The Zaddik: The Battle for a Boy's Soul** Elaine Grudin Denholtz

A thirteen-year-old Brooklyn boy is kidnapped and hidden for years in Europe and Canada. Incredibly, the abductors are a Hasidic rabbi and his zealous followers backed by top-dollar lawyers. Against these forces the boy's immigrant Israeli mother stands alone, ignored by an indifferent district attorney who, rumor has it, needs the Hasidic vote for his upcoming reelection. What are the motives of this sinister Hasidic underground? To her urgent queries the mother receives only a bizarre, cryptic response: The rabbi has detected in the boy "a special light" that has predestined the child to become a Zaddik, a man so righteous he will be privy to the will of God and be an inspirational leader to the Jewish people. But to fulfill this destiny the boy must be sequestered, removed from all outside influence including his mother's, to receive the special training that only this ultra-orthodox Hasidic community can provide.

If this book were not based on actual events, the plot of Elaine Grudin Denholtz's gripping suspense story might seem preposterous. But her tale is all the more shocking because it is true. With a gift for realistic dialogue and sharply drawn characters, Denholtz creates a dramatic portrait of religious fanatics who arrogantly defy the law.

Reported on Israeli television as well as in newspapers from the *New York Times* and *Newsday* to Israel's *Maariv* and *Yediot Ahronot*, the facts of this story have dramatic tension that keeps the reader both fascinated and horrified: false passports, hideouts in France, the boy's father wired by the New York police, a bloody knife fight outside a yeshiva, the brainwashed son testifying against his mother, two courageous lawyers who battle the system for four years pro bono, and a riveting jury trial.

*The Zaddik* is more than a tale of kidnapping and the battle for a boy's soul. It invites us to ask ourselves, Where does religious devotion end and evil begin?

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