



Title: The Grayling
Author: Cheryl Freier
Treatment By: Sean M. Dunne

Mission Statement:

The Grayling is the heart-wrenching story of one family's struggle to survive in the Czechoslovakian wilderness while being sought out for extermination by the Nazis during World War Two. The easily identifiable characters and the dangers they face while fighting to survive make this a film that audiences of all ages and backgrounds will be drawn to. The story seamlessly blends romance and humor with fast-paced action and tense thrill sequences to bring the viewer a glimpse of what it must have been like during one of the darkest times in human history.

The small cast and intimate settings are what set this World War Two tale apart from so many others. Instead of offering the viewer a large sweeping view of the conflict, *The Grayling* gives the reader a more poignant look at what it was like for the individual, rather than the masses, to face the horrors of the relentless Nazi war machine.

The film story blends Cheryl Freier's narrative with the mood of Martin Freier's poetry to bring a unique perspective to a widely explored and heavily produced subject matter.

Logline:

A Jewish family struggles to survive in the forests outside of their Czechoslovakian village after escaping the clutches of the Nazi war machine. Their determination, resourcefulness and love for each other are all they have to defend against the threats of both man and nature as they ride out the horror that was the Second World War.



Treatment:

Micholovce, Czechoslovakia, October 1942 - Atop a hill, HENRY FREIER (5), a plump, cherub faced boy, climbs onto a jagged rock and takes a heroic, defensive stance. Henry's sister, EDITH (17), gently coaxes him down and tells him that even heroes need to eat. Henry protests and says that he'll skip dinner to stand guard. Edith, smiling, asks why he thinks he has to guard the family. "Because the Germans are coming," he cries.

Henry and Edith enter their small home where the rest of the family waits at the table. JOSEPH FREIER (45) commends Henry for a job well done. Henry smiles proudly. His mother, ANNA (38) serves dinner to her other sons, SAM (16), MARTIN (13) and BERNARD (10). Heavy footsteps, followed by the resonance of a rifle butt beating against the door, interrupt the meal. Joseph waits until the door is nearly beaten down, and then opens it. Three German soldiers enter. "Come with us," they shout.

The family is piled into the back of a truck as their frightened neighbors look on. As the truck bounds over bumpy roads, the passengers listen intently, trying to figure out where they are going. The truck stops and everyone is told to get out. The prisoners are marched, single file, along a winding dirt trail to a cramped, fenced in area. Hundreds of prisoners are there already. Joseph notices that the fence is a flimsy mesh wire, and that one, lone guard patrols the perimeter. Sam motions to Joseph, and the family makes their way to the back of the pen. Sam lifts the wire and the family escapes into the nearby woods. They stumble for miles through the darkness until they reach a clearing where they collapse on the ground. No one speaks. Their exhaustion is debilitating and sleep comes quickly.

At dawn Joseph leaves his family and makes his way to the house of his friend FRANK (50). He knocks on the window pane of the living room. Frank waves him inside. "Please, help me and my family," Joseph pleads. Frank nods reluctantly and tells him to stay put until he returns. Nazi soldiers patrolling the streets pay no attention to Frank as he hurries to the makeshift office of the town's mayor, BENJAMIN (60). Frank tells Benjamin of the Freier family's escape from the Nazis and asks for his help. With no consideration to the matter, Benjamin tells Frank that for three hundred dollars, Joseph's family will be off of the list. He dismisses Frank abruptly.



After dark, Frank and Joseph drive the back roads to the Freier's deserted home. Frank watches as Joseph carefully counts his steps, then drops to the ground and starts digging with his hands. Together, they unearth a tin box. Joseph gives three hundred dollars to Frank and takes two hundred for himself. He buries the box again. Frank drives Joseph to a clearing in the woods. Joseph kisses Frank's hand in appreciation before he heads back into the woods to rejoin his family. From his lookout, Sam spies Joseph approaching and runs to him, nearly knocking him over as they embrace. As Joseph enters, the relief the family feels at his return is palpable. He tells them they are going home. Anna is hesitant, but he tells her that they are safe from the Nazis, for now. Joseph discloses his encounter with Frank and the deal made with Benjamin. At nightfall, the family journeys home.

Once Joseph and Sam ensure that it's safe, the Freier family enters their home where they enjoy a meal together and wash up before retiring for the night. The following evening, Joseph and Sam venture out. The neighborhood at first seems untouched by the war, but the silence is foreboding. Broken glass and abandoned suitcases litter the streets. They make their way to Frank's house, this time entering through the front door. Frank tells them that Benjamin has arranged for his family to stay, but Joseph must sign over his lumber business to Frank and become his foreman. He explains that they may remain with special permission from the Nazis because their business has been designated as needed for the German cause. With doleful obedience, Joseph concedes and thanks Frank for all he has done for his family.

October 1943 - Anna is preparing a meal, Edith reads a book and the boys are gathered around a chess board. Joseph frantically enters the house. He tells his family that the Germans are returning and this time they intend to take all the Jews away on a train. He peels back the wallpaper of the living room wall and removes a stack of money. Edith begins to cry and asks Joseph where they will go. He tells her that they will cross the border and board a train for Switzerland. He has arranged for a guide to lead them to safety.

After dark, Joseph's hired GUIDE (35) leads the family deep into the woods. Sirens scream in the distance. Their guide emits a warning call like the chirp of a bird. Joseph whispers that everyone needs to crawl on their bellies from this point on. They crawl for miles until Anna cries out that she can go no further. The guide is alarmed by something in the forest and he orders the family to take cover.

Another family emerges from the darkness. The Freier's guide approaches the man leading them. The men get into a heated conversation. The man speaking with the Freier's guide whistles loudly and ducks for cover. From their hiding place, the Freiers watch in horror as a dozen Nazi SOLDIERS appear out of the forest. They brutally gun down the unsuspecting family. A gravelly voice orders the soldiers to



leave the dead Jews there to rot. Joseph and his family, paralyzed with fear, remain crouched in the bushes for hours. When it's safe, Joseph ushers the family ever deeper into the forest until, just before dawn, they reach a cave in the foothills of a mountain near a small stream. Henry fills their canteens with fresh water. Anna and Edith gather wild mushrooms while Joseph and the boys clear the cave for a shelter. As they sit down to dine on cheese, crackers and wild mushrooms, Joseph says that all they need is a pot of coffee and they will be set. Anna chuckles. It is contagious and soon they are all laughing.

Joseph and Sam set out early the next morning. They head for a spot in the woods where the men of Joseph's former lumber company will be cutting down trees. They hide in the woods and await Frank's arrival. On Joseph's signal, he and Sam ambush Frank before he is seen by the men. They cover his mouth and drag him to nearby cover. Frank tries to resist but eventually recognizes Joseph. Joseph divulges the story of their flight and offers to pay Frank to bring food and supplies to his family periodically. Frank warns that they could be in the forest for months, even years. Sam quips that it beats being dead. Frank nods solemnly and agrees to do what he can for them. Frank hugs both Sam and Joseph and tells them, "God be with you."

April 1944 – Henry and Bernard crouch behind a fallen tree. Bernard has his hand over Henry's mouth. They hear a loud snap. Releasing Henry, the boys leap over the tree and jump to the ground. "We did it," shouts Bernard, raising a rabbit high over his head like a trophy. They race back to the cave where the boys proudly display their prey. Anna claps her hands and gives the boys a hug. She tells them this rabbit will make a fine stew. Sam teases that it is too small and scrawny. Anna chastises him and sends him to the clearing to see if Frank dropped off any potatoes to add to their rabbit stew.

Detouring from his usual route, Sam picks up a jagged rock and marks off trees as he goes. The sound of rushing water is barely audible. As he ventures, he finds a small waterfall that pours into a lake. Sam slurps up handfuls of the fresh water. He freezes as a high-pitched tone greets his ears. A young woman, SARAH (16), glides over the surface of the water singing the same tune over and over. Mesmerized, Sam watches her drift to the bank. Confidently, the young woman emerges from the water, fully clothed. She lifts the hems of her long skirt and wrings them out. Her wet blouse clings to her body.

Sam calls out to her and waves his hands in the air. She turns to him with fear and consternation and calls back, "Who are you?" Sam stutters another hello. Sarah tells him to not to come any closer, she is not alone. Sam raises his hands in the air as if he is surrendering. He confesses that he and his family are hiding from the Nazis in the woods. "Then you must be a Jew?" she stammers. Sam is hesitant. "Well, answer



me,” she demands. “Yes, I am a Jew,” he says with conviction. “Well, so am I,” she says proudly. They pause, gazing at each other for a moment and then share a smile. She tells Sam she must go. He watches, until she is out of sight.

Sam rushes to the clearing and gathers a hefty burlap sack left by Frank. He races home retracing his steps, ensuring that he will be able to find his way back to the lake. As Sam enters the cave, Joseph asks where he has been. Sam tells him that he has been exploring. Joseph clearly doesn’t approve. Sam assures him that he need not worry, Joseph has taught him well. Anna glances at Sam, a knowing look on her face.

The next morning, Sam eats quickly and tells his family that he is off to fish. Joseph suggests he take the boys along, but Sam protests that they will slow him down. As the hours roll by at the lake, Sam keeps a hopeful eye out for Sarah. Near dark, he rises dejectedly and starts to leave until he hears Sarah singing, nearby. He follows the voice. “I thought you wouldn’t come,” he startles her, standing on the shore. Sarah composes herself and gives him a smile. She tells him she cannot stay. Sam takes her hand and asks her name. She tells him that it’s Sarah and that, yes, she will be there again tomorrow.

The next week Sam rises and readies his fishing gear. He tells Anna that he will be gone most of the day. She begins to question him about going fishing every day for two weeks, but his eyes plead with her not to make him answer. He kisses her cheek and departs.

Sam gathers wildflowers as he makes his way to Sarah. Sam sneaks up on her at the lake and puts a hand on her shoulder. She gasps and spins to find him smiling at her. He warns her to be more careful; what if he was a Nazi soldier? Sarah laughs off the thought and asks if the flowers are for her. He sheepishly hands them over. Sam and Sarah spend the afternoon chatting about their lives before the Nazis arrived. Sam learns that Sarah comes from a wealthy family and that she cannot wait to return to her home after the war. Sam asks how she knows that her house will even be there. She assures him it will. The sky turns gray, and Sam tells her that he must go before the rain comes. She invites him to come with her to her hideout.

Sam and Sarah climb a steep hill, past dozens of deeply set pine trees. There, in the thick brush, is a large, wooden house with hand carved shutters and thick chiseled planks for its front door. As they reach the house, Sarah’s sister, MOLLY (12), runs out to greet them. Sarah’s father, JONAH (50), and mother, RACHEL (35), welcome them in. They enter a spacious living room filled with ample wooden chairs, each with hand-sewn quilts on top of them. There are lace curtains and fine china on the dining table. “So this is Sarah’s friend?” Jonah grins. He tells Sam that he must stay



for dinner. While feasting on potatoes and venison, Sam tells Jonah about his father's lumber business and his family's current predicament. Jonah frowns deeply, but says nothing about it. As it begins to get dark, Sam thanks them for their hospitality and excuses himself saying he must return home. Jonah gives Sam some cookies for his journey. Sarah peeks out of the kitchen as Sam heads home.

Sam enters the small cave empty handed. Anna questions the fact that he fished all day and caught nothing. He shamefully apologizes and says he hopes to have better luck tomorrow. When Sam leaves to gather wood, Anna instructs Martin to follow his brother tomorrow. The following morning, Sam heads straight to the lake, with Martin secretly in tow. Martin watches in amazement as Sam teaches Sarah to fish. At the cave, Martin blurts out that Sam has found a girlfriend. Anna steps back, frowning worriedly.

As he and Sarah fish, Sam notices a flash of light across the lake. "What is that?" he asks. Sarah informs him that it is just Molly sunbathing. Sam rises suddenly, grabbing Sarah by the arm; he tells her that they must go. A lumbering, gray cloud blocks out the sun. Molly stands and brushes off her clothes. She folds a piece of cardboard, fashioned with tin foil, and heads up the hill. A gunshot rings out and a bullet grazes Molly's head. Molly falters, stunned and shaking, as nine SOLDIERS close in around her, demanding to know where she is from. Her purple lips cannot answer. A soldier slaps her. As she falls to the ground, her hand brushes against his rifle. Instinctively, he fires. Confusion and disbelief cloud Molly's expression as she glances at her blood soaked clothes. She turns her eyes up. The last things she sees are the indifferent faces of the men who've murdered her. The soldiers follow a path to Sarah's house. Their rifle butts crash through the front door, revealing Jonah and Rachel hovering together. Jonah gently moves Rachel behind him. He holds up a hand and opens his mouth, but he has no words for them. The soldiers open fire, brutally cutting them down.

Sam and Sarah hear the shots long before they reach the house. Sarah tries to run, but Sam pulls her back. He tells her not to go. She struggles, crying that she must go to her family. Sam pins her to the ground and tells her that she must be quiet. Sam holds tight as she pummels him until she is out of strength. Sam loosens his hold. Looking him in the eye, Sarah screams out. As he lunges for her, she screams out again, louder and louder. He lets her go and she runs off screaming for her mother. Sam bows his head, resigned. He flinches as three shots are heard. Sarah lies lifeless on the shore.

Sam hides under a bramble bush, shaking with fear. As the barking of dogs grows louder, Sam grabs the berries and begins rubbing them all over himself. The crackle of leaves grows louder as the barking draws closer. A dog emerges, sniffing the air.



The dog stops for a moment then charges after a small brown rabbit. Soldiers are heard in the distance, changing direction. Sam begins to crawl toward the cave. He is nearly home when he is overcome with fear and grief. He lies prostrate, behind a rotting tree. A hand reaches in and pulls him up. It is Martin. Sam tells his brother to let him be, he has nothing to live for. Martin grabs Sam by the shirt and pulls him close to his face. "Then you have let the Nazis win."

Martin drags Sam toward the cave, stopping every few feet to listen for soldiers. When they finally arrive, Sam slumps to the floor. For two days, he lies in bed barely moving. On the third, everyone is relieved when Sam declares that he is hungry. The family watches him eat, smiling. Sam tells them his story, and confides that he had loved Sarah. Joseph tells him this world needs love, however brief it may be. Sam tells Joseph that he must go back. Joseph says that they will do it together.

Sam leads Joseph, Bernard and Martin to the lake. Working together, they collect the bodies of Sarah's family and bury them. The men pray as Sam lays wildflowers at the grave. Afterward, Joseph orders Bernard to take what food he can from the house. Joseph warns him not to tell his brother.

It is nearly dawn when the men arrive home. They succumb to their exhaustion and sleep late into the day. They are awakened by cannon blasts and explosions in the distance. Joseph commands his family to pick up whatever they can; they must leave the hideout now. There is no discussion as the family complies and they are soon ready to depart. They trek for nearly eight hours before Joseph stops them near a cave similar to the one they just vacated. "This is our new home," he says solemnly. The family enters and lays on the damp ground, oblivious to the outside world.

The next morning, no one in the family has the strength or motivation to do the things needed to make the cave livable. Joseph tries to rally them, but his words of encouragement lack conviction and they all know it. Sam gets to his feet and addresses the others. He tells them that he understands how they feel, but that they owe it to Sarah's family, and all of the Jewish families that have been butchered by the Nazis, to survive and let the world know what they've suffered through. "If no one does this," he urges, "then, to the rest of the world, it will be as if we never even existed." Sam's words move the others to action. Joseph and the boys construct a hidden entrance. Anna and Edith gather mushrooms and berries and Henry sets up his hand-carved wooden soldiers. As they sit to dinner that evening, Joseph glances around their new, slightly more spacious, dwelling. He smiles and tells his family that they are moving up in the world.

The next morning, planes are heard overhead as the rumblings of an airstrike give way. Joseph informs his family that they must stay hidden. The battle clamors on for



nearly three days. Hunger sets in as the supplies dwindle. Edith screams out as an enormous rat races across the floor. Joseph grabs a block of wood and hammers the rat. From outside, the shouts of Nazi SOLDIERS marching by, petrifies the family. They pray in silence for God to keep them hidden as a battle rages outside of their hidden door. Then, as suddenly as it began, the fighting stops. "Do we dare venture out?" Anna whispers. "If we don't, we die," Joseph tells them.

Joseph opens the hatch of the bunker and the wind blows life into the family sheltering within. As they exit, they must shield their eyes from the bright sunlight. Henry tugs on Joseph's hand and asks his father if the war is over. Joseph tells him that all they can hope for is that it is the beginning of the end. Joseph can see that this is not enough. Sam volunteers to go and find out from Frank if the war is over. Both Joseph and Anna are adamant that he stay with them. Sam argues that someone has to go, and Joseph is too important to the family to risk making the dangerous journey. Reluctantly, his parents agree.

The going is slow as Sam tries to find his way back to the first cave that housed his family. He circles back on himself twice before he finally reaches his old, makeshift home. The door to the shelter lies near the entrance, full of bullet holes. Inside, the walls are littered with white divots where bullets have chipped off the surface rock. "I'm glad we missed that party," Sam mumbles to himself.

The next morning, Sam shivers in the cold as a steady rain falls near Frank's logging site. For two days, Sam waits, but there is no sign of Frank; he can wait no longer. On his return journey, Sam is spotted by a pair of Nazi SOLDIERS, who stealthily follow him back to the cave. As Sam is about to enter, they rush him and burst through the door. Holding the Freiers at gunpoint, the soldiers seem as frightened as the family. Joseph realizes that something is off. He accuses the Nazis of being deserters. The men assure him that being deserters won't prevent them from killing Jews if they have to. Anna tells them that there will be no need and invites them to share in their meager dinner.

Following the meal, the two deserters break out flasks of alcohol and proceed to get drunk. The more inebriated they become, the harsher they treat the Freiers. When one of the drunken men grabs Edith and kisses her roughly, Sam and Martin get to their feet. The second soldier pulls his gun and orders everyone but Edith outside. Joseph shakes his head slowly, "Not a chance." The soldier turns his gun at Joseph, but Sam moves quickly and jabs his hunting knife into the soldier's throat. The second deserter, unarmed, flees in the commotion.

Joseph orders the family to get ready to leave. Deserters or not, they've killed a Nazi and have to go. Sam reminds them that they've killed no one; only he has. Anna



knows where this is going and tells him that he can't leave them. It kills Joseph to admit it, but he knows Sam must go. The family gathers whatever provisions they can and pack them for Sam. When the time comes for goodbyes, the feeling pervades that this may be the last time they see their son and brother. Anna and Edith weep as Sam ventures into the forest.

May, 1945 – Joseph, Anna and the children somberly carry out their chores. Martin begs his parents to let him go and search for Sam. Anna tells him that she will not risk losing another son. Before Martin can plead his case, Frank steps into the clearing, carrying a rifle. Frank and Joseph lock eyes, unmoving, for a long tense moment. “Something’s wrong,” Anna whispers at this side. Frank glances around the clearing and walks slowly to Joseph and Anna. “It’s over,” he tells them. Disbelief clouds Joseph and Anna’s expressions. A slow smile from Frank lets them know that it’s true. Their joy fades as quickly as it came on as they remember Sam.

“Sam went looking for you,” Anna tells him. “Over a month ago now. When he couldn’t find you, we feared the worst.” Frank grins, “He did find me.” Anna and Joseph are confused. Frank says that it just took him a little longer than planned. Frank lets out a shrill whistle, drawing Sam out from behind a thick tree. “I had to make sure you weren’t the only ones out here who did not know that the war is over,” Frank smiles at her. Anna runs to Sam and wraps her arms tightly around him. Sam’s sibling rush to welcome him home with tears of joy.

Joseph offers Frank his hand and says that there is no way that he can ever repay him for everything he has done for the family throughout the war. Frank tells Joseph that if he takes his damn lumber business off of his hands, they can call it even.

THE END