

Parallel Journeys Study Guide

Parallel Journeys by Eleanor H. Ayer

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Parallel Journeys Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 - 2.....	4
Chapters 3 - 4.....	7
Chapters 5 - 6.....	10
Chapters 7 - 8.....	13
Chapters 9 - 10.....	16
Chapters 11 - 12.....	19
Chapters 13 - 14.....	22
Chapters 15 - 16.....	25
Chapters 17 - 18.....	28
Chapters 19 - 20.....	31
Chapters 21 - 22 and Epilogue.....	33
Important People.....	36
Objects/Places.....	40
Themes.....	42
Styles.....	48
Quotes.....	50
Topics for Discussion.....	53

Summary

Parallel Journeys is a true story about two people who live during the time of Nazi terror in World War II. The story is told by the author, Eleanor H. Ayer, with material written by Helen Waterford, a young Jewish woman, and Alfons Heck, a young German man, inserted throughout.

Helen had grown up as a Jewish girl in Frankfurt, Germany, in the early 1900s and married a strict Jewish man, Siegfried Wohlfarth, in 1933. Adolf Hitler was rising to power during this time and life became very difficult for Jews so Helen and Siegfried fled to Amsterdam, Holland, and lived a relatively normal life, even having a daughter named Doris in 1937. The Nazis began taking Jewish people in Germany and surrounding countries from their homes and sending them to concentration camps. Eventually the Nazis came to Holland looking for Jews. Fortunately, Helen and Siegfried were able to find a home for Doris with another family to spare her the terror of the camp. Helen and Siegfried were sent to a concentration camp but were soon parted and Helen never saw Siegfried again.

During this same time, Alfons, who was a young boy, was inducted into Hitler Youth, the organization that trained young men and women to fight for Germany. Alfons was drawn into the zeal and indoctrination promising everyone a new and better Germany. Alfons quickly excelled and ultimately became a glider pilot and then a high-ranking officer commanding more than 6,000 young soldiers.

While Alfons rose to personal power, Helen was enduring hell on earth at the Birkenau concentration camp and then at the Kratzau work camp for women in Czechoslovakia. The women in the camp were assured that they were to work, that this was not a death camp and that provided some relief from the terrors Helen experienced at Birkenau. By the time the Russians freed the prisoners at Kratzau, Helen was very weak and sick but the war was over and this was a huge joy.

Alfons returned to his village to find it and his home destroyed. He was then arrested by American soldiers and eventually released. Alfons suffered a crisis of conscience over the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the war and attended the Nuremberg Trials to see some of the officers tried for their crimes. A few years after the war, Alfons left for Canada and eventually moved to the United States.

After the war ended, Helen made the arduous journey back to Amsterdam and soon found her daughter. Friends found meager accommodations for them and Siegfried's former boss paid her half his salary. Eventually, Helen and her daughter left for the United States to join her parents who had fled there a few years before.

In an unusual twist of fate, Helen and Alfons were both living in the United States when Helen saw a newspaper article written by Alfons. Helen contacted Alfons, they discussed their parallel journeys and gave lectures on their different viewpoints of the war and the Holocaust.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Parallel Journeys is the true story of two people who lived through Hitler's Nazi regime in the 1940s in Europe. The author tells the story of a young Jewish woman, Helen Waterford, and a young German boy, Alfons Heck. Helen and Alfons lived very different lives, Helen as a concentration camp survivor and Alfons as an officer in the Hitler Youth military organization. Many years after the end of World War II, Helen and Alfons met and did lectures on the atrocities of the Third Reich from their individual perspectives.

Chapter 1 begins by emphasizing the importance of the Nazis to young Germans in the 1930s who were indoctrinated with Adolf Hitler's philosophies from the first year of elementary school. For many years, Germany had been recovering from the fallout from World War I but now prosperity had returned and life was good. Hitler promised that the good life would continue because the Germans were the master race, the highest human beings on earth. Hitler told the members of his youth organization, Hitler Youth, that they would one day rule the world. There were exceptions to this in that Hitler despised Jews, gypsies, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses and anyone with a deformity.

Alfons Heck, a young German boy from Wittlich, considered himself very lucky to be one of Hitler's chosen people. When he was 6 weeks old, Alfons' parents moved with his twin brother to Oberhausen, leaving Alfons to live with his grandmother.

Adolf Hitler was Austrian by birth but fought for Germany in World War I. Hitler blamed Germany's defeat in the war on the Jews, communists and labor unions. People who agreed with Hitler formed the Nazi party, National Socialism, which meant national socialism. During the 1920s, the Nazis tried to take control of the German government and failed but Hitler ultimately rose in popularity because he promised people a way out of poverty. In January of 1933, the people of Germany declared Hitler to be their leader. Within two years, Hitler created jobs for six million people and restored their pride in Germany. Hitler ruled with an iron hand though and people were afraid to speak out. Hitler's government became known as the Third Reich.

Alfons recalled being sad when his friend, Heinz Ermann, was no longer allowed to attend school with Alfons because Hitler wanted all Jewish children removed from the schools. Millions of boys and girls joined Hitlerjugend, Hitler's youth organization. The young people were instructed to believe that Aryan Germans were better than other people and that their primary loyalty belonged to Hitler and Germany, even above God and their families. Alfons recalled seeing Hitler in a parade one evening and the magic of the night made Alfons believe that anything was possible in the new Germany.

In Chapter 2, Helen and her family lived in Frankfurt, Germany. Helen's mother was German and her father came from Lithuania. They knew that Hitler hated the Jews but



the thought of mass murder seemed implausible. Helen loved all the cultural attractions of Frankfurt and went to college, much to her mother's chagrin because she wanted Helen to marry as soon as possible. Marriage was not in Helen's plans because she hoped to study and travel. Eventually Helen did marry a man named Siegfried Wohlfarth, a man she met while on holiday one year. Conditions for the Jews were worsening in Germany and Helen and Siegfried began making plans to leave. Jews were still allowed to own their own businesses in the Netherlands so Siegfried made plans to join a friend of his, A.G., in his business there.

In September of 1933, all Jews lost their German citizenship and most towns started to cleanse themselves of Jewish people. More than 100,000 Jews left Germany during Hitler's first two years in power. Helen and Siegfried settled in Amsterdam and soon met other young couples who had also fled Nazi Germany. Helen and Siegfried's daughter, Doris, was born in October of 1937. The young couple was happy but Siegfried could not get a raise in pay so Helen went to work as an interior designer. During this time, Helen met Ab Reusink, a carpenter who would come to play a big part in her life one day.

Analysis

This is a nonfiction book which means that the story is true and the events actually occurred for these two people, Helen and Alfons. Stylistically the author provides factual text throughout the book and supplements it with text pulled from separate books written by Helen and Alfons. This supplemental text is written in the first person point of view because it is coming from either Helen or Alfons. The author's text is written in the third person point of view because the subject is something she knows about but she does not have first hand experience with, so she cannot use first person perspective. The supplemental text helps to add authenticity to the story by offering more emotion and thoughts about what is going on for Helen and Alfons as the story extends.

The author begins the book with a good explanation of the fertile ground that allowed someone like Adolf Hitler to rise to power. Germany was still paying debts and trying to recover from World War I and times were hard for many people. So when the radical Hitler arrived with his promise of an end to poverty, the German people embraced him. The German people were so eager for a better life that they even began to buy into Hitler's theory that there were certain people--mainly Jews--who were to blame for all of Germany's problems. Eventually, Hitler was able to begin the eradication of this "problem" with not much feedback from the German people. Life was finally getting good again and it was not a good idea to contest any ideas.

The theme of anti-Semitism is planted in this chapter as it becomes known that Hitler despised the Jews. It is ridiculous to think that a race of people could be the source of all the economic and social problems within a country, but Hitler's own passionate hatred fueled him and people were either too afraid to say anything or too pleased that economic conditions were improving that they did not want to contest Hitler's ideas. Jewish people like Helen's parents never thought that Hitler's plans of mass murder



would ever come to fruition because that would have been madness. Little did they know at the time just how mad Hitler was and that the horrors to come would be unspeakable.

Hitler wanted to create a master race which meant Aryan people with heritage that did not include mixing of Jewish, African or Asian blood. It is typically understood that Hitler's ideal people had blonde hair and blue eyes and were physically fit. The people of the master race were also supposed to be heterosexual and free from any deformity or mental illness. Drug use, alcoholism and smoking were frowned upon too. Aryan men were expected to be strong and physically fit enough for military service while the women were to be fertile and produce many Aryan children.

The theme of blind ambition is planted in this chapter as well. Hitler had a vision of the Germany he wanted to create and he was ruthless in his quest to achieve it. Hitler lied to the German people when he told them why he was eradicating the Jews or why he was invading surrounding countries. It was always positioned that whatever Hitler did it was for the good of the German master race which he proclaimed to be the most perfect in the world.

The indoctrination of the German school children is especially frightening because they were forced to follow Hitler and Nazi beliefs at an age when they were not allowed to protest. Even parents had no say in what would happen to their children; they were to give them up for the good of the state and there was nothing that could prevent that. The indoctrination would occur in daily lessons as well as huge events with much fanfare so that the children would be caught up in the excitement and want to be a part of something so spectacular. The German children in the 1930s and 1940s had no chance to escape the indoctrination and service to this madman, Hitler.

Vocabulary

Nazis, crammed, glorious, communist, Jehovah's Witness, Jews, allies, raspy, vineyard, dictatorship, rumor, decree, fury, economic, Third Reich, inferiority complex, discrimination, Aryan, buntings, outrageous, anti-Semitism, synagogue, pogrom, splurged, immigrants



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Alfons was sworn into the Jungvolk, the junior version of Hitler Youth, in April 1938. The study of Nazi beliefs was considered to be more important than their education of school subjects and membership meant loyalty until death. The Nazis would imprison any parent who tried to prevent his or her child from joining. The children were encouraged to join because they were considered to be superior people who would one day rule the world. Alfons belonged to the drum and fanfare platoon, Fanfarenzug, which performed at every Nazi rally. After only five months, Alfons was chosen to attend the Nuremberg Party Congress, Reichsparteitag, in September of 1938. Alfons recalls the splendor of seeing and hearing Hitler speak and knew that he would be loyal to the Nazi leader for life.

During 1938, Hitler began his takeover of neighboring countries under the guise that the German people needed more land but his real reason was to take over those countries. Hitler took over Austria and the Austrian people were happy to be unified with Germany once again. Then Hitler moved on to Czechoslovakia and had taken it over within 6 months. These victories proved to the Hitler Youth members that Hitler was invincible and this further reinforced their loyalty to him.

In Chapter 2, the author describes the events of November 9, 1938, called Kristallnacht, or 'the night of broken glass'. Nazi SS, Schutzstaffel, soldiers fanned out into the towns and cities of Germany and Austria and broke the windows in all the Jewish shops, buildings and synagogues. Nazis attacked with axes, hammers, guns and hand grenades. Injuries, death, theft and looting followed in this clear sign that the Nazis planned to destroy the Jewish people. The attacks were organized by Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and second in command to Hitler. SS soldiers even searched attics in homes and rooted out Jewish people, loaded them into trucks and drove them to concentration camps. In all, 20,000 Jews were killed, injured or arrested during this event.

The German people were shocked by the Nazi attacks of Kristallnacht and Hitler could not understand their reaction because Hitler believed the attacks were a proactive move against the Jews who had planned to destroy all Germans. In Frankfurt, both Helen and Siegfried had brothers who was shipped off to a concentration camp. To add outrageous insult to injury, Hermann Goring, a high-ranking Nazi in charge of the German economy, demanded that the Jewish people pay for the destruction created by the Nazis.

Many Jewish people such as Helen's father believed that things would improve for the Jews if they could just wait out the terror. Earlier that year, Helen's father had been taken to Buchenwald concentration camp but was released when Helen and Siegfried obtained a visa for him to come to Holland. Helen's father did not want to leave without his wife and son, but after Helen's father was arrested on Kristallnacht, an SS guard



learned about the visa and helped Helen's father escape to Holland. Siegfried's English relatives took Helen's brother and by early 1939, Helen's mother and Siegfried's parents were able to leave for Holland.

So many more Jews had no place to go because other countries couldn't accommodate the massive amount of people and they also did not want to invite trouble which was sure to follow. Helen's parents and her brother narrowly escaped to America in early 1940 because Helen's father was Lithuanian and the Lithuanian immigrant quota in America had not yet been met. Only 800,000 Jews were able to escape Germany by leaving Europe; 7 times that number would perish by the end of the war in 1945.

Analysis

The author continues to tell the story of Hitler's rise to power and Nazi occupation from the two opposite viewpoints of Helen and Alfons. Alfons is elated that he has been chosen to be a future leader of Germany. Alfons has reached the age where he can join the Hitler Youth in the junior level. Alfons is completely taken in by all the fanfare and promises of world leadership. It is easy to see how a young boy could be so infatuated with dreams of glory, both personal and civic, when Germany had been in a depressed state for so long. Hitler made the German people feel proud again and the children like Alfons felt cherished and preferred to be selected as an important factor in the rise of the Third Reich.

Little did the German people know that Hitler planned to take over neighboring countries, not for the sake of additional land and farmland for the German people as he said, but for the occupation of those countries. Only those in Hitler's inner circle knew about his evil plans while he put forth a face of making decisions all in the name of the betterment of Germany. The theme of good vs. evil is highly relevant here as Hitler perpetrated heinous acts in the name of the German people who had no idea, and certainly no control over what Hitler's real intentions were.

At the same time that Alfons was at the height of his glory under the Nazi regime, Helen, her family, and other Jewish families were experiencing unspeakable terror at the hands of the Nazis. In November of 1938, the Kristallnacht occurred, frightening the Jews in its intensity. Anti-Semitic behavior had been occurring with more and more outright publication of hatred of the Jews but they could not have imagined that the Nazis would have taken things to the extreme like they did during Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht, which means night of broken glass, was a pogrom (organized deadly attack) in Jewish communities throughout Germany and Austria. The name comes from all the broken shards of glass resulting from the destruction of shops, hospitals, synagogues, schools and other Jewish buildings. It is widely accepted that Kristallnacht was the beginning of what Hitler called 'the final solution' to the Jewish problem, meaning that the extermination of the Jewish people officially began at this point.



It is important that Alfons attended the Nuremberg Party Congress for a rousing session of Nazi fervor, as it was also Nuremberg where the trials of the Nazi officers were held after the war. Their rise and utter defeat ironically took place in the same city.

In terms of style, the author begins to introduce important names in the Nazi regime: Hermann Goring, Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. She also provides the German names for some of the organizations and events occurring during this time. This gives the story the additional authenticity necessary to validate it as nonfiction work.

Vocabulary

Fatherland, gypsies, superior, armband, swastika, fanfare, feverish, jab, oppression, reunification, abstract, hysterical, bleak, fleeting, paswned, boorish, accommodated, Torah, ransacked, disregard, conspiracy, deported, abominable, grim, visa, intellectual, diphtheria



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

By the end of 1938, there were more than 7 million members in Hitler Youth, and in March, 1939, the Nazis passed a law requiring all Aryan children to join the organization. Any parents who objected to their children being part of the group were threatened that their children would be put in orphanages or placed with more loyal families. In 1939, the Reich Youth Service Law was passed which required young people to work on farms in the summer and fall to help with the harvest. Many parents objected when Hitler Youth activities interfered with religious services but there was nothing they could do about it. The young people enjoyed being part of this prestigious group and considered themselves to be the future leaders of Germany.

On September 1, 1939, Germany declared war on Poland and World War II officially began. Hitler's troops moved so quickly into Poland that it was called a Blitzkrieg (lightning war). Germany's air force, Luftwaffe, destroyed Poland's air force before its planes could even leave the ground. England and France warned Hitler that they would align with Poland if he did not withdraw. Hitler thought the other countries were bluffing but England and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. Germany continued its aggression and Poland was completely defeated by October 6. Hitler negotiated with Russia to divide the conquered Poland and soon declared that the Polish Jews must leave Poland or face death. Hitler began secret plans to invade France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands despite having told the Allies that he wanted peace.

In Chapter 6 the story continues as the Nazis conducted another Blitzkrieg, this time on Holland, on May 10, 1940. Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as British Prime Minister because Chamberlain could not manage what he knew was coming.

Helen, Siegfried and their friends tried to anticipate what would happen next, some of them even contemplating suicide over the prospect of such horrific futures. Helen and Siegfried learn of a British ship waiting in the port of IJmuiden to rescue Jews and take them to England. Helen was not able to find a taxi willing to take her and Siegfried to the ship and later, tragically learned that Siegfried's cousins had tried to reach Helen and Siegfried but their telephone wire had been cut. The ship left for England only half filled to capacity.

On May 14, Holland surrendered to Germany which soon also took Luxembourg and Belgium, and on June 14, the city of Paris fell to the Nazis. Great Britain feared that it would be next on Hitler's radar.

Helen and Siegfried prepared to go into hiding and began to look for a non-Jewish family for their daughter, Doris, to stay with so that she would not be pulled into the atrocities facing the Jewish people. Helen and Siegfried are assisted by a friend named



Ab Reusink who helped them find a hiding place and made arrangements for Doris to be taken in by another family for the duration of the war.

On July 2, 1940, Hitler attacked Great Britain but the military and people of England held fast and even sent their own air force to attack Germany on August 26-27. On September 15, Hitler ordered his air force to attack the city of London instead of the British air force bases. The British air force persevered and the German invasion was cancelled.

The Jewish people continued to suffer new injustices when the Nazis forced government agencies to fire Jewish workers. Jewish newspapers were shut down and Nazi Storm Troopers attacked Jewish areas of Amsterdam.

Helen and Siegfried needed to dispose of their household belongings so they "sold" them to a friend, Ab Reusink, who would keep the items for them. Months later, when the Nazis questioned Ab about the items, Ab was able to present a "receipt" for the household goods that were supposedly sold to him by Helen and Siegfried. The Germans had to pay Ab for the items and Ab saved the money for Helen and Siegfried. Ab was also Helen and Siegfried's first choice as a guardian for Doris, but Ab would have raised Doris to be Catholic and Helen and Siegfried did not want Doris to be brought up in any religion.

The Germans stepped up the building of concentration camps to keep Jews and other enemies of the Reich. One camp built near the Czechoslovakian border, Auschwitz, ultimately killed nearly 2 million people.

Analysis

Aflons continued to enjoy the glory in being a part of Hitler Youth but the author tells the full story in that neither the German children nor their parents had any say in whether or not they wanted to be a part of the organization. It must have been horrible as a parent to know what would be happening to your child under Hitler's rule and not be able to do anything about it. This is another example of good vs. evil as Hitler orders the children to be educated in his rules and to even be removed from their parents' homes if the parents had any objections.

The author tells about how pervasively the wrath of the Nazis increased in 1939 and 1940. In spite of talking about peace, Hitler was secretly planning more invasions into nearby countries in order to take them over as another step in his plan for domination. Hitler's Blitzkrieg against Poland was just the beginning of his plan for occupation of surrounding countries, all driven by his blind ambition for power. Hitler was oblivious to anything in his path of destruction in his single-minded objective of becoming a world power. Hitler completely personifies the motif of good vs. evil in his thoughts and actions.



When the Allies joined Poland in their fight against Hitler it was at least one step toward the destruction of the evil empire created by Hitler. Little did the Allies or the rest of the world know what horrors still laid ahead for European Jews under Hitler's control.

The insertion of Alfons' and Helen's stories continue to plot their course during the war. Helen's stories are particularly poignant, especially the one about not being able to get transportation to the British ship willing to take Jews to England, and her heartbreak over having to find someone to keep her daughter and not knowing if she would ever see her again. In the middle of all the horror, there were a few good people and Ab Reusink befriended Helen and Siegfried and was a loyal friend to them. Finding someone to trust in this reign of Nazi terror would have been nearly impossible because most people feared for their own lives too much and could not risk their own safety for anyone else.

Vocabulary

orphanage, threaten, raid, hurl, flatcar, stalemate, neutrality, thwart, paratroopers, evacuation, relentlessly, desperate



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

The Jews in Alfons' town of Wittlich had all but disappeared and Alfons paid little attention to how they had been treated. The newspapers were filled with stories about how the Jews were trying to corrupt good Germans but Alfons could not really understand how they could be much of a threat to Germany. Alfons thought that Auschwitz was a big farm and did not understand why people were making such a fuss about having to work on a farm.

On December 18, 1940, Hitler gave a speech to his staff in which he addressed "the final solution to the Jewish question." One of the tactics was to invade Russia in spite of signing a non-aggression pact with Russia just a year earlier. Hitler also gave the SS the power to exterminate all Jews and other political enemies of the Reich. Most people thought that the final solution involved shipping Jews to Poland to work for the Reich; no one really understood that Hitler's final solution meant extermination. Hitler even threatened his officers with death if they were to reveal the real objective behind his final solution.

On June 22, 1941, the Nazis invaded Russia but the Russian army held until the middle of September when the first snow fell and Hitler's army was not prepared for the brutal winter weather that followed. This was the beginning of Germany's defeat in the war against Russia.

Chapter 8 continues with Helen reluctantly agreeing to visit a fortune teller with a friend. Helen didn't take the fortune teller seriously when she told Helen that Helen would be a widow and that a man named Max would be important in her life. The fortune teller also told Helen that death would come to her family that same week and the police would be involved. Helen later asked Siegfried if he knew anyone named Max and Siegfried told Helen that a man named Max had taken over Siegfried's place of employment and he fired all Jewish employees. Despair overtook Siegfried as he now had no income and was responsible for Helen, Doris and his widowed mother who was living with them. Siegfried's mother was overcome with depression and killed herself by taking too many sleeping pills.

Conditions in Holland continued to deteriorate for the Jews whose telephones were taken away as well as their use of public transportation. Jewish radios, bicycles and other valuables had to be surrendered and Jews were not allowed out on the streets between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. In addition, every Jew had to wear a yellow star sewn to the sleeve of each piece of outer clothing. Atrocities accelerated from December 8 to December 10 as the Nazis shot and gassed more than 25,000 in Latvia and Yugoslavia. This rate of killing continued throughout the Reich under the orders of Adolf Eichmann, a lieutenant colonel in the SS and mastermind of the exterminations.



On January 20, 1942, Eichmann presented his plan for exterminating the Jews to top Nazi officials but no record was ever made of it to avoid potential blame at some point. The plan was to evacuate Jews farther and farther to the east to concentration camps in Poland where they would be killed. By July, 1942, the concentration camps were ready to take in the thousands of Jews headed their way. Every day trains of freight cars took Jewish people eastward and they had no idea where they were going.

Analysis

The brainwashing of the Hitler Youth continued with news that the Jews were threats to Germany. Alfons could not really understand how the Jewish people could be any kind of threat and he knew they were being shipped eastward but he did not really give it any thought about where they were going or what was happening to them. Plus, Alfons thought that Auschwitz was a farm and he did not see why working on a farm was such a bleak fate since he had lived and worked on a farm his whole life. Clearly, the motif of good vs. evil was in play but at the time the Hitler Youth did not realize that they too were being manipulated by Hitler's strategies and would be victims of the war, although not to the degree perpetuated upon the Jewish people and others Hitler annihilated.

The theme of man's inhumanity to man is clearly evident in Hitler's "final solution to the Jewish question" which meant extermination of all Jews within his grasp. Up until this point, the Nazis intimidated the Jewish people by seizing their property and hoping to force them into leaving Germany. But with the acquisition of Poland and Holland, the Nazis had millions of Jews to deal with and needed a solution. Many Jews were forced into ghettos while their fate was determined. The final solution was conducted in two phases. First, after Germany invaded Russia in 1941, the Nazis began killing all Soviet Jews by open executions and gassing them in mobile killing vehicles. Second, European Jews were herded into concentration camps where they were executed in gas chambers. The strategy was to move the Jews from the West to the East where the concentration camps had been built in Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Ukraine.

Hitler continued his secret attacks on neighboring countries even after agreeing to non-aggression pacts; this time it was Russia but the Russians were able to deflect the Nazis by holding out until the bitter cold weather collapsed the German military efforts there.

It is interesting to note that although Alfons did not pay much attention to the Jews in his hometown, and while he was still a Nazi zealot, he did not understand what harm the Jews could really cause in Germany. Alfons was probably like most of the Hitler Youth in that they were caught up in the fervor of Nazism but didn't really understand the full impact. And how could they? The high-ranking Nazi officials kept their horror-ridden plans private and Hitler lied to other countries while planning war against them. This philosophy was much too complicated for children to understand but they were being brainwashed with the threat of death for non compliance.



Helen's visit to a fortune teller, which did not yield good news, is a bit of a frivolous break in the tensions stretching through the book at this point. It seems as if Helen and her friend needed a distraction from their troubles even though the results are not what Helen would have wished for.

Good vs. evil continues to perpetuate as Siegfried and many other Jews lost their jobs, plunging them even further into despair when they could not provide for their families. Many Jews could not bear the incredible anxiety of waiting to be taken away and killed so they committed suicide. Siegfried's mother was one of these people. She knew that she was a burden on Siegfried as his widowed mother and she knew her probable fate at the hands of the Nazis so she just facilitated the process.

Vocabulary

threat, relieved, shrieked, invasion, deported, fate, siege, staggering, exaggeration, disastrous, retreat, dismay, propaganda, defiantly, downfall, catastrophe, intention, trance, endangering, ridiculous, depressed, humiliated, dignity, neutrality, miscalculation, extermination, genocide, evidence, ghettos



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

Alfons claimed that the two best years of his life were 1942 - 1944 when the German Empire was at the largest it ever was. The Hitler Youth was fueled by glory and the future that had been promised to them. When he was 14, Alfons left the Jungvolk and joined the Hitlerjugend and was soon invited to join the Flieger Hitlerjugend, the junior air force. Air power was the new force in warfare and Alfons reveled in the training. Alfons aced his flight in a glider and he determined that he wanted to join the Luftwaffe, the air force, when he was able. The Luftwaffe was headed by Hermann Goring, the man second in command to Hitler. While the Luftwaffe was thriving, the rest of the German military was not operating as it had been and people began to question Hitler's decisions.

The Allies were pushing the German forces back in North Africa run by General Erwin Rommell who was called the Desert Fox. Ultimately, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery totally defeated the Germans in Africa in October of 1942. The German war effort in Russia finally collapsed and the fighting ended on February 3, 1943. Out of the 300,000 German soldiers sent to fight in Russia, only 5,000 returned.

The Hitler Youth received new training and Alfons was sent to a weapons course in Wittlich. The war was moving closer to Alfons' home and the outlook was not as bright as it had been, yet Alfons remained enthusiastic about his role in Hitler Youth and his promotion to Scharfuhrer in charge of 50 boys.

In Chapter 10, the SS continued in its objective to exterminate all Jews. It was not uncommon for the Nazis to round up thousands of Jews and gas them in vans or shoot them in remote forests, burying the bodies in mass graves. Helen and Siegfried received a letter ordering them to appear at the Amsterdam train station on July 15, 1942, for "Resettlement to the East." Helen and Siegfried found a doctor willing to remove Siegfried's perfectly healthy appendix just to give them two more weeks to try to find a way to avoid resettlement. Helen got a job as a cook at a Jewish retirement home but after three months, Helen showed up one day and all the people were gone. Helen then realized that they had been lied to about the resettlement meaning work because the people from the home were infirm and could not work at all.

The group that rounded up the Jews was called the Gestapo led by Heinrich Muller. Muller was Adolf Eichmann's superior and oversaw the management of the death trains headed east. Helen and Siegfried lived in terror as they heard the footsteps of the Gestapo officers on the sidewalks at night outside their door. Jews disappeared by the thousands, some to the death camps and some into hiding. Some of the people who helped the Jews were called Righteous Gentiles and it was through this network that Helen and Siegfried found a new home for Doris. A man named Jo Vis helped secure the home for Doris and wanted to help Helen and Siegfried too but it would take a little



while longer. Doris went to live with her new family on October 22, 1942, six days shy of her fifth birthday, and the last time Siegfried would ever see her.

Analysis

The tide was turning for the Allies and Hitler's military forces were suffering major defeats. In anger, Hitler intensified the final solution of killing the Jews and thousands lived in utter terror about their fate. No doubt Hitler could see that his power could be threatened and he needed to complete his mission of annihilating the Jews before that happened.

Alfons continued his advancement in Hitler Youth and remained naively unaware of what terror the Nazis were inflicting on the world. It seems incredible that a teenaged boy like Alfons would be so unaware of what was happening to Jewish people at this time. People from Alfons' own village were disappearing and he did not even consider what might be happening to them. Was the final solution to the Jewish question so secret that no one other than Hitler's high-ranking officers were aware of it? Were Alfons and the other boys so blinded by Hitler's persona that all reason fell to the side? It seems difficult to imagine that someone could not question what was going on but it is important to remember that the German children were raised from a very early age in Hitler's doctrines and they were not allowed to question anything. The children would not have seen their parents questioning anything related to the Third Reich either so they were both indoctrinated not to question and they had no parental behavior to emulate.

The intensity of Germany's military failures worsened the situation for Helen and Siegfried too as they knew their time would soon be coming and they would be rounded up and sent to a concentration camp. A ray of light in all this madness were people like Jo Vis and other Righteous Gentiles who try to help the Jews. Righteous Gentiles were people of non-Jewish heritage and religion who made concerted efforts to help save Jewish people during the Holocaust. Because they risked death for themselves and their families by aiding Jews, the Righteous Gentiles had to be careful in carrying out their methods of assisting Jews. Many times, unless they knew the Jewish people personally, the Righteous Gentiles waited to be approached by Jews seeking help. It was so dangerous for anyone to take any proactive measures for the sake of the Jews that everything had to be conducted with the highest level of secrecy. It must have been a huge comfort to the terrified Jews that there were still people willing to risk everything to help their fellow human beings. These examples of extraordinary courage provided brief hope for mankind in a world gone mad.

Helen's description of taking Doris to meet her new parents is especially heartbreaking. One can only imagine the emotional pain of her parents giving their child away so that she could live a life without them in it. It is even more devastating to know that that was the last time Siegfried would see his little girl. This act of selflessness in a time of such loss and fear is almost beyond human comprehension, yet it gives hope that love can prevail even in the most horrific of circumstances.



Vocabulary

glorious, unparalleled, patriotic, prestigious, slogging, anxious, superb, ecstatic, nevertheless, transformation, tremendous, catastrophe, dismiss, eventually, optimistic, ruthless, undesirables, skimpy, mistrust, bedridden, righteous, gentile, underground, fortified



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

Early in 1943, German industrial cities were bombed by the British at night and by the Americans during the day. More than a half million German children were evacuated to remote parts of Germany under the KLV program (Kinder Land Verschickung) to protect them from the bombings. Hitler Youth officials took advantage of the sequestered children and intensified their Nazism indoctrination. Alfons and his friend, Rabbit, studied to take the highest level of glider training. The Luftwaffe's ranks had diminished seriously which made Alfons even more eager to fly. The German air force began calling up older men and young boys to fill the vacancies left by pilots killed in war.

Women, too, now became part of the German war effort as they were called to work in factories. Younger children were sent to work on farms or collect scrap metal and cloth. Teenagers called into active duty saw their friends die in front of them and started to become disillusioned about the glory of Germany and giving their lives for the Fuhrer. Alfons was eager to get into the action and was a good pilot but he became too cocky during a training exercise, ignoring the hand signals of his instructor. Alfons was immediately kicked out of the Luftwaffe for disobeying. Four days later, Alfons was given a reprieve and the commandant gave Alfons a second chance. Alfons made the next two flight tests and achieved the coveted flight C level. The next day, Rabbit was on a free flight when the area was overtaken by American bombers. A Luftwaffe instructor named Sergeant Baum was also in the air and fired on the Americans who fired on him in return, killing Baum but diverting the fire power away from Rabbit.

In Chapter 12, Helen's neighbor chastised her for giving up Doris as Jewish families all over Europe were struggling with that same issue. It was not easy to know what to do, whether to behave passively toward the Nazis or resist their terror in any way possible. Jews living in Warsaw had been living in deplorable ghetto conditions for a few years and they finally chose to revolt on April 13, 1943. It was mostly the young people in the ghetto who attacked their Nazi captors with homemade weapons and held out until May 8 when the SS attacked the group's leaders who were either killed or committed suicide. By May 16, the Jewish district in Warsaw was obliterated.

Helen and Siegfried knew that they could wait no longer to go into hiding so they carried false identification and took a train to the town of Zaandam where they were to stay with a young couple with two small children and a grandmother. After a few weeks, the couple could not continue to endanger their family so they asked Helen and Siegfried to leave. Helen and Siegfried had this same experience many times during early 1943. Helen and Siegfried eventually found asylum for a year at a large house in Haarlem owned by a woman who rented the second floor to a seamstress and her elderly mother. Helen and Siegfried spent most of their time reading and Siegfried wrote journals on how the world could be if hatred and anti-Semitism were abolished. Helen and Siegfried had no contact with Doris but Ab visited her regularly and sold the



Wolfarths' jewelry to pay for her care. Their friend, Rinus, also visited Doris and brought pictures of her to show her parents how happy and content she was.

The extermination of the Jews continued with such persistence that the war effort came second because the death trains took precedence over shipments of military equipment and supplies. All branches of the German military were breaking down and the leaders of the Allies took advantage of this crack in the armor to plan a major new attack. The initiative was called OVERLORD with the objective of re-taking France from the Germans. The operation began on D-Day, June 6, 1944, when the Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy and then went ashore to free the French people. Helen and Siegfried heard of the invasion and were hopeful that the Allies would reach them soon.

Unfortunately, the Allies did not move quickly enough and on August 25, 1944, Helen and Siegfried were arrested by the Gestapo and taken to a prison. Two days later, they were taken to a train station to board a train for a transit camp called Westerbork. A week later, Helen and Siegfried were taken to the train station again and were forced into a freight car along with about 160 other people. The train had a seemingly unending string of freight cars crammed with people forced to stand the entire trip. The passengers had no idea where they were going and Siegfried told Helen that he did not think he would survive the experience but that she would and would be able to raise their daughter.

Analysis

The Nazis continued their indoctrination of children as the Allies bombed and destroyed their large cities. Their stance of unrelenting education and brainwashing could have been perceived as futile given that the Allies were encroaching on German territory. The Nazis never gave up hope though and did everything they could to protect their own children, those born to lead the master race. Alfons and his new friend, Rabbit, were blissfully unaware of the scope of the war and that the Germans' chances of winning were dwindling daily. As long as the Nazi propaganda continued, so would the Hitler Youth.

As the war progressed, the Nazis began to press the women into manufacturing work and even children were sent on scrap metal and cloth pick ups. Although Alfons was not one of them yet, many of the young men in the German military were becoming disillusioned with Hitler's dreams of grandeur. They had been through enough war at this point and suffered injuries and the loss of friends so that they questioned Hitler's methods. Of course, none of their disgruntlement was ever voiced because this would have been considered treason and reason for death.

Obedience under Nazi regime was paramount. Alfons got a lesson in reality when he was grounded from flying after disobeying a commander's signals during training. If Alfons had disregarded an order in battle, he would have been shot. Learning the gravity of his mistake weighed heavily on Alfons and he realized that so far he had not really been touched by the actuality of war and had been riding high on the enthusiasm



of flying. The training incident had been sobering and Alfons vowed to be more mature in his decisions from then on. Disobedience could be catastrophic for a military unit and Alfons needed to learn this lesson. Alfons was grounded for a few days and given another chance, something that did not happen often for anyone under Nazi rule.

Choices were being made all over Europe during this time and Helen still struggled with a particularly agonizing one--sending Doris away to live with another family when she really wanted her child with her. This is particularly painful for Helen when another woman chastises Helen for sending her own child away. Later, Helen would learn that this woman and her children would be taken away and killed so Helen has a brief flicker of hope for her own family that she had done the right thing for Doris.

Again the theme of extraordinary courage arises with the people who agree to shelter Helen and Siegfried in their homes. Anyone caught hiding Jews risked the safety of themselves and their own families so any act of humanity could be followed by death. The drive to do the decent thing was short lived in some people when the reality of the massive risk actually set in and Helen and Siegfried were asked to leave. But there were some people whose desire to help the Jews in this impossible situation was greater than their fear of repercussions and their courage is beyond commendable.

It is interesting to note that as the Nazis realized that their armed forces were breaking down and they were not as victorious as they had assumed they would have been, the intensity of killing the Jews increased. It was almost as if they knew that the end of the war was coming and they needed to complete their final solution for the Jews before that day came, because after the war they would be called up for their actions and the killings would have to stop.

Vocabulary

fortified, remote, advantage, sarcasm, hangar, antiaircraft, savage, delusions, violent, rephrase, prestigious, passive, overran, futile, deformed, resistance, uprisings, content, risky, overshadowed, hindering, persistence, precision, priority, victorious, capable



Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

Alfons was now 16 years old and really anxious to fly a glider in battle but the Allied attack on D-Day meant that the Hitler Youth must be used on the ground to hold back the advancing Allied troops at the West Wall which ran along the Western border of Germany. Alfons was shocked to know that the enemy was this close to German soil. The Hitler Youth were to be the first line of defense on the West Wall and Alfons was appointed Gefolgschaftsführer, a rank similar to army captain, to lead up to 190 boys. Alfons was now to be a paid soldier in Hitler's army but it was the power he wanted more than the money.

Alfons moved his troops to a town called Remisch and they took over a school for their quarters. One afternoon, two of Alfons' boys were killed and more injured when two British planes attacked. The commander of the unit was one of the boys killed and Alfons took over his position, putting Alfons in charge of 2,800 boys and 80 girls in the Hitler Youth. Alfons was warned by his commander to keep the boys from deserting because Alfons would be shot by the Gestapo if that happened. The Gestapo had ultimate power to punish and Hitler wanted it that way. Many of Hitler's officers began to question his mental stability and his ability to make sound decisions. One of the officers, Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, and a few accomplices hatched a plot to assassinate Hitler but it failed and von Stauffenberg was shot along with 5,000 others who were suspected of being involved in the plot.

After the assassination attempt, Hitler trusted no one, not even the fanatic Hitler Youth members. One morning Alfons was picked up by a driver and taken to a clearing in a forest where he saw an armored train surrounded by SS guards. Alfons was admitted to the train and joined about 50 other men. The Minister of Armaments and Ammunition, Albert Speer, thanked the men for their service during a time when it looked like Germany would lose the war. Alfons was shocked when Speer introduced Hitler who entered the room and told the men that they were critical in holding back the enemy. Hitler said a few private words to each man before he left and Alfons knew nothing in his life would top that moment.

In Chapter 14, Helen and Siegfried's train reached its destination after three days. Everyone on board knew they had been brought to this concentration camp to die. Helen learned that all mothers with children were immediately killed and she finally knew she had done the right thing by leaving Doris with another family. Helen noted a nice looking officer making decisions about where to send the people coming off the trains and learned that he was Dr. Josef Mengele. The prisoners at the camp called Mengele "The Angel of Death" because he not only made the decisions about who was to live or die, but also did grotesque biological experiments and operations on the Jews in the camps.



Helen was tattooed with an identification number on her arm, stripped naked and searched for valuables. Then all the women had their head and body hair shaved off, forced into a cold, outdoor shower, and issued a dress to wear. The barracks where the women were to live were horse stables with no windows and stacks of bunks. The next morning began the first of several in which the prisoners were ordered to stand outside, sometimes for hours at a time, while roll call was taken. Helen learned that she was at Birkenau, one of 40 concentration camps at Auschwitz in Poland.

Despite the horrific living conditions, Helen tried to keep herself clean using cold water or snow. There was no soap, towels or toilet paper and soon lice became a common enemy, not just for the discomfort but the fear of the disease of typhus they carried. Helen got sick with scarlet fever and hid in an upper bunk to avoid going to the hospital where most patients ended up being killed. Helen also learned that it was best to keep a low profile in order to stay alive longer. If a prisoner showed any signs of illness or weakness, he or she became a target of abuse by the Nazis. Helen was selected to join a group of 300 women shipped out to another camp. Helen recalled that it was October 28, 1944, Doris' seventh birthday.

Analysis

The war raged on but Germany was losing its fighting edge with the deterioration of its armed forces and the advancing Allied troops on German soil. Alfons and the Hitler Youth were getting a real taste of warfare and the shock that Germany was in danger of losing the war. Alfons was especially shocked when a superior officer told him that it was possible that Germany may be defeated. Alfons knew this type of treason was punishable by death. Alfons also took on greater responsibility in the ground war even though he would rather be flying a glider plane because he had committed himself to Hitler and would do whatever it took. Even though things were looking more vulnerable for Germany, Alfons was elated on the day he met Hitler and counted it as one that would never be surpassed. Alfons' dedication and fervor remained unchanged in spite of all that was going on around him and he was taking on more power and acted ruthlessly along with it. The indoctrination Alfons received in the Hitler Youth organization was firmly instilled in him.

It is interesting to note that even some of Hitler's officers had determined that he was a madman and definitely not fit to rule a country. The assassination attempt, while failed, proved that Hitler was losing power among those in his closest circle, and that this was the beginning of the end for the dictator.

Helen's experiences at Birkenau are detailed with horrific accuracy. The indignities and horrors suffered at the hands of the Nazis are almost too terrible to believe. The theme of man's inhumanity to man is very important here as Helen's degrading and painful experiences at Birkenau are revealed. It does not seem possible that people could treat other people so inhumanely and the horror of it all is almost unfathomable. Helen did have one relief, though, in that she learned that women with children were killed immediately upon arrival at the camp. Helen then knew that she made the right decision



to leave Doris with a strange family in Amsterdam instead of keeping Doris with her and Siegfried. If there could be any relief in such an environment, Helen at least had this bright spot.

Helen seemed to have amazing survivor skills and quickly found ways to adapt to keep herself alive. Helen also tried to maintain as much dignity as possible in such a horrible place by trying to keep herself clean and reminding herself that she was a person with value and would not give in easily to the attempts to debase her. Helen has been spared some of the more grotesque behavior perpetrated by the Nazis on Jews as would later be revealed. Helen knew of Joseph Mengele who performed experiments on the people in the concentration camps. Mengele was particularly fascinated with genetic experiments conducted on twins. Mengele also decided who would live or die at Birkenau, and Helen was right to not go to the hospital because patients were killed if they had not recovered within a brief period.

Vocabulary

enthusiasm, treacherously, inland, stammered, convent, discipline, desperately, diligently, chaos, comrades, insignia, artillery, assassinate, camouflage, deportation, crematoria, revolt, typhus, lice



Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

The Allies broke through the German West Wall in December of 1944. Alfons' commander visited Alfons and told him that Alfons would be sent home very soon because it looked like the end of the war was coming. Alfons was instructed to lead the Volkssturm (People's Militia) back home in Wittlich. It was a pathetic force of remaining men between the ages of 15 and 60, and women between the ages of 16 and 50. None of the force had any military training and no real weapons with which to fight. The people knew that this was Gotterdammerung (Twilight of the Gods) and the end of the Third Reich. Before Alfons left for Wittlich, a lieutenant told him that dying for the Fatherland was not as noble as living for it and that Alfons should choose life.

Germany's last big attack in the war came on December 15, 1944, in the Ardennes Forest in Luxembourg. The Germans fought aggressively for several days in new battles, but on December 24, the tide turned and the Americans pushed the Germans back into Germany. The Americans also bombed many German towns that were supply points and one of them was Wittlich, Alfons' hometown. Alfons had just arrived home but lived through the Christmas Eve bombing by hiding in a shelter. The entire town of Wittlich was destroyed along with Alfons' grandmother's farm. On January 1, 1945, the Luftwaffe made its last major attack with 800 planes bombing Allied bases.

German troops were now trapped between advancing Allied forces from the west and Russian forces from the east. Hitler made his last radio broadcast on January 30, 1945, the twelfth anniversary of his rise to power. Russian troops were now only 70 miles away from Berlin. The Allied forces attacked the city of Dresden on February 13 in a move that they hoped would bring Hitler to his knees. Alfons was promoted to Bahnfuhrer, placing him in command of 6,000 troops and he was not yet 17 years old. Alfons moved his troops to the front lines to fight the Americans and many of them were killed.

In Chapter 16, Helen arrived at a work camp called Kratzau in Czechoslovakia. The camp commandant told the women that they were to work in a factory with 900 other women. This was only a work camp, not an extermination center. Helen and the other women were given heavy metal pins with the words WERK KRATZAU on them which they were required to wear. Helen had no way of knowing that as soon as she had arrived at Kratzau, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler destroyed the crematoria at Auschwitz. and that all gassings stopped on November 28, 1944. The Nazis wanted no trace of their horrendous crimes left behind. Almost 2 million people had died at Auschwitz. The Germans also conducted forced marches of remaining Jews by having them walk without coats or boots into remote areas and lie down. Those who could get up the next day moved on, those who could not were shot.



Helen and the other women tried very hard to stay alive in the bitter cold and harsh conditions at Kratzau. Desperation forced some into theft and brutality. Hygiene conditions were just as bad as they were at Auschwitz and the women had to be taken away for delousing treatments. One day, four women from the International Red Cross arrived at the camp to inspect the conditions and the commandant told them that the women refused to use the new showers because they thought they were gas chambers but the Red Cross women did not ask any questions of the prisoners. Helen finally got a different dress to wear to replace the one she got at Auschwitz 4 months ago but the only shoes available to her were one black and one brown men's shoes but she took them anyway. Food was sparse at the camp and one day Helen collapsed from not having enough to eat. It was determined that Helen also had Hepatitis and she was hospitalized where she at least could wash with warm water and sleep on a straw mattress.

On January 27, 1945, the Russians liberated the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps. Medical teams set to work on the 7,000 Jews remaining there. The prisoners had to be given food in small portions because they had been starved for so long that their bodies rejected it. Helen and the other women at Kratzau heard that the Nazis were going to kill any remaining prisoners in the other camps so there would be no witnesses, so when Helen and the other women were loaded up for another delousing trip they felt sure they were going to be killed.

Analysis

Throughout the book the author has used the German terms for some events and items which help lend authenticity to the piece. Even some of the responses are made in German by Alfons and others to help the reader understand some of the German language used in interactions. It is also interesting to note that some of the words did not exist before the rise of the Third Reich, as they were created for use during the Nazi regime.

Alfons' grand vision for Germany had died. The war was not going to be won by the Nazis and Alfons was sent home to lead a rag tag bunch of civilians in defending this western area of Germany. Instead of being discouraged, though, Alfons accepted his orders and obeyed because disobedience meant death. Alfons listened to his superior officers say that they war was all but lost and he was afraid for them for making such treasonous statements. In an instance of foreshadowing, an officer told Alfons that it was better to live for the fatherland rather than die for it, and while Alfons considered that to be treason at the time, later on the advice would save his life.

In the final days of the war, Alfons, who was only 17, was put in charge of 6,000 Hitler Youth as the Americans advanced on the West and the Russian on the East. The gravity of his situation would have leveled many people but Alfons still had the courage of his convictions and ruthlessly gave out his commands. Could it be that Alfons still believed that somehow the Nazis would pull out of this situation? Did Alfons still believe in German supremacy to the point of making decisions that could have prevented much



death and injury? On the other hand, what can be expected of someone who was only 17 years old? How could a teenager deal with such overwhelming responsibility? It is easy to see how Alfons and the other Hitler Youth had also become unwitting victims of Hitler's rule and Alfons will come to that conclusion at the end of the story.

Helen's story is bleak and moving. It is difficult to even imagine the conditions she described and even harder to think about the mental anguish she and the other prisoners must have suffered during this time. Again, the motif of man's inhumanity to man is prevalent. It is also unfathomable that the women from the International Red Cross did not engage with any of the prisoners or explore the living conditions any more than they did. How could someone witness this horror and just walk away? It is a lesson that these things did happen and that human beings were destroyed in the millions. The fanaticism of just one man created unspeakable hell for generations of people and the impact continues to exhibit in the world.

Vocabulary

miserable, discouraged, twilight, madman, massive, defensive, surrender, formations, wail, insistent, panic, rubble, rage, refugees, asphalt, turret, commandant, haunt, abuse, filth, civilians, hepatitis, contagious, extreme, starvation, delousing

Chapters 17 - 18

Summary

Alfons traveled to the Rhine River area to help defeat the Americans at what was considered to be the last critical point in the war. Alfons remained confident in German victory but others were not so sure. Desertions were occurring more frequently in spite of executions for those captured. The officers of Hitler Youth ignored the order to shoot deserters, though, because they realized the war was a losing proposition and it would just mean the unnecessary loss of teenage boys.

The Germans began blowing up bridges on the Rhine on March 5, 1945, in an attempt to keep the Allies from further entering into Germany. Alfons was saddened when he saw the state of this once powerful army now beleaguered and in chaos. Alfons was dispatched to a town called Spang near Wittlich with a mission to save some expensive radar equipment from the Americans. Alfons was also ordered to take four days leave before returning to the command post. While on leave in Wittlich, the Americans invaded the town and Alfons was terrified now that he had encountered the enemy this close. The Americans enlisted Alfons' help because he could speak both German and English. The Americans later detained Alfons when they realized he was an officer. Alfons was ordered to turn himself into the Americans in the next unit because this unit was moving out and could not take a prisoner. Alfons thought about what his friend had told him about choosing life and Alfons returned to his grandmother's farm.

In Chapter 18, the Russian troops freed the prisoners at Kratzau on May 9, 1945. Helen walked out of the prison gates and threw herself into a field of lilies of the valley, rejoicing in her freedom. Germany had officially surrendered on May 7, 1945, with more than 3.3 million soldiers killed. On April 29, Hitler had named Navy Admiral Karl Donitz to replace him as leader of the Third Reich. Hitler then proceeded into his bunker in Berlin where he married his girlfriend, Eva Braun. The next day, both Hitler and Eva committed suicide and Hitler's guards took their bodies outside and burned them.

Helen's first objective after receiving her freedom was to find food. A Russian soldier gave Helen some chicken and bread but she vomited because her stomach was not used to the rich food. Finding relatives was another prime concern for everyone after the war. Helen would have to travel 600 miles across a devastated Germany to reach Amsterdam but Helen and a girl named Becky set out on foot to go home. By foot and random train rides, the two women traveled 80 miles westward by May 20. Helen and Becky registered at a camp for Displaced Persons (DP) set up by the Americans where they received food and medical care.

After the war, it is learned that nearly 6 million European Jews died during the Nazi regime. Hitler's objective of extermination of all Jews was nearly realized. As Helen continued her trek home, she noted a marked lack of Jewish people but she is still unaware of the final overwhelming devastation of the Jewish population.



Helen learned about a train that would be leaving soon to take Dutch citizens back to Holland, and even though she was not Dutch, she was determined to be on the train when it left. Suddenly, though, Becky betrayed Helen by pointing out that Helen was a German citizen, not Dutch, and Helen was taken to prison where she was locked up for three days. A rabbi was able to arrange for Helen's release and she was sent to a holding area with some other women. When Helen learned that the women were to be deported to Germany, she took matters into her own hands and explored the streets looking for a way to get to Holland. Finally, Helen encountered some old friends who connected her with a truck that was driven to Amsterdam every morning. When Helen could not produce the correct documentation, she firmly decided that she was not getting off the truck and started to yell about the inequity of her surviving death in a concentration camp and then being told to get off a truck that could get her closer to home. Helen's shaming the driver worked and Helen was on the truck when it left for Amsterdam. Helen eventually made her way to the Reusinks' home and learned that Doris was alive and well.

Analysis

It seemed that it is the beginning of the end for Germany's war effort. Troops had been diminished and replaced by boys of Hitler Youth. Military equipment had also been depleted after several years of war. The glory that was to be the new Germany had seriously disappeared. Even Nazi officers started to believe that Hitler was a madman incapable of ruling a country anymore. What is surprising, though, is how the officers were becoming more vocal about their disbelief that Germany could win the war. Alfons was shocked to hear the statements and considered them treasonable but he was still blinded by youthful naivete. Surely, Alfons must have witnessed Hitler Youth officers turning the other way when deserting boys were supposed to have been shot. It speaks volumes that these officers felt that killing any deserters would not further the war effort, but unnecessarily take teenage lives. Could it be that these men were not completely brainwashed by the code of the Third Reich and did what they had to do to survive in dangerous times? It is encouraging that common sense and decency prevailed, at least a little bit, in these men.

In spite of his military rank, Alfons was still just a boy as evidenced by his terror when encountering the American soldiers on the road to Wittlich. During all the years of the war, bravado was the byword and now that the war was in his backyard, Alfons cowered like the boy he was. This was to be expected and not a bad reflection on Alfons. No boy should have seen what Alfons had seen in his formative years.

It is interesting to note the point at when Alfons essentially stopped being a soldier. When he was captured by the Americans and ordered to turn himself in, he chose to disobey and returned to his grandmother's farm instead. Alfons maturely took the advice of his friend who counseled him earlier that it was far better to live for the Fatherland than die for it and that Alfons should make that choice if the time ever came. The time did come and Alfons chose to live even though Alfons had no way of knowing that Hitler had committed suicide and basically abandoned all who followed him. It is a good



lesson in following your own conscience and heart whenever possible and making decisions that stem from truth and integrity.

It seems strange that anti-Semitism was still prevalent after the war. On her way home to Holland, Helen encountered many instances of discrimination and outright hate and she was surprised by it. It would seem that seeing Helen's physical appearance, and guessing at her fragile emotional state, that people would have had more compassion for her as a fellow human being. Unfortunately, there is no expiration date on hate and Helen certainly experienced it firsthand but chose to rise above it.

Vocabulary

awesome, reputation, convinced, scarfaced, coward, panic, desperate, resistance, merely, collapse, artillery, gable, bullhorn, top-secret, pondered, bunker, overwhelmed, obstacles, displaced, terrified, tremendous, horror, genocide, survivors, displaced, hesitated



Chapters 19 - 20

Summary

Alfons learned of Hitler's death on a radio broadcast and did not blame Hitler for committing suicide because it was a better fate than he would have experienced had he been captured. As ordered, Alfons turned himself in to American troops who came next to Wittlich. Alfons was put to work as a translator for the Americans until they found out that Alfons had been a Hitler Youth officer and he lost his job.

When Alfons first heard about the horrors of the concentration camps, he did not believe the stories much like many other Germans. Alfons and the rest of Germany began to rebuild their lives and their country. When the Americans left Germany and the French arrived to occupy it, Alfons was arrested for being a Hitler Youth officer. The French were ruthless because their country had been invaded by Germany and they wanted justice. At the age of 17 and in prison, Alfons learned that he was to be executed by firing squad along with a few other men. Alfons later heard from a French soldier that they would not be executed, that the French commander wanted to have some fun with the Germans and threatened them with death. Alfons was released two weeks later but ultimately received a sentence of one month of hard labor and was not allowed to leave Wittlich for two years.

In Chapter 20, Helen learned that Jo Ris' sister had been Doris' foster mother for the past three years and Helen was so happy to know that Doris had been with friends. When Helen was taken to see Doris, the child barely acknowledged Helen. Helen was anguished about whether she should take Doris away from the family she had known for three years or to take Doris with her and start a new life together. Eventually, Helen knew that she had to have Doris back in her life because Helen had stayed alive only for her child. At first Helen and Doris lived in two spare rooms in an attic with no furniture or running water. Doris showed signs of illness and one day screamed that she wished Helen had never come back. Before too long, Helen and Doris were able to move to more amenable living quarters in their old neighborhood.

Helen had received no indication that Siegfried was still alive but his boss began to pay Helen half of Siegfried's salary. Helen spent the summer of 1946 recovering physically and mentally and finally decided that Siegfried must have died in the concentration camp. Helen knew that she had to make a life for her and Doris so she took her parents' advice and decided to move to America to be near them. Helen and Doris sailed from Rotterdam and arrived in America on February 10, 1947.

Analysis

Even though Alfons had seen so much death and injury in war, he defended Hitler's decision to commit suicide because his fate would have been much different had he



been captured by the Allies. Hitler drove Germany to ruin, was the reason for so many deaths of German soldiers as well as Jews and other undesirables, yet Alfons remained loyal to him. Alfons also did not believe the stories and pictures of the dead Jews at the concentration camps. Was it too horrible for a boy to comprehend? Was this simply naivete or was Alfons also guilty of blind ambition to a degree? Did he want to maintain his belief in the fuhrer regardless of what happened? Did Alfons think there was a possibility that the Third Reich would rise again and he would be part of that new glory? For whatever reason, Alfons' loyalty to Hitler was unwavering even though Hitler caused so much damage, even to Alfons' home and friends. Just imagine what the world could be if that type of loyalty and determination were to be channeled for a good cause.

For the second time in her life, Helen was conflicted by a major decision regarding her child. Should she let Doris stay in the home she had come to know over the last few years or should she take Doris with her and live with her natural family? Helen had good instincts about leaving Doris to save her life and she must have relied on those same instincts when deciding that Doris should live with her natural family. The transition period was clearly difficult for Doris but Helen had lived through worse than this and she knew that she could create a new life for her and her daughter. Their little family was not complete without Siegfried but Helen waited a more than reasonable time for his return and he never came home. Helen was forced to come to the unhappy conclusion that Siegfried had died at the concentration camp.

Helen decided to move with Doris to America to be with her parents and start a new life. Helen was filled with trepidation, though, and wondered if moving was the right choice. It seems as if the idea of moving to a country where she would be free and near loved ones would be an overwhelmingly joyful time but perhaps Helen had had enough trauma and disruption in her life and did not know how much more she could survive.

Vocabulary

starvation, fanatic, captors, rubble, lard, tremendous, burden, liberated, disbelief, mournfully, dangling, revenge, fortress, devastated, penitentiary, betrayed, remnants, confinement, harsh, outraged, secrecy, facilities, formal, shattered, suspicion, unspeakable, dwell, malnutrition, sensitive,



Chapters 21 - 22 and Epilogue

Summary

Schools finally reopened in Germany and Alfons was excited to go and learn again. Alfons was haunted by memories of the war and his service to Hitler and could not ease his mind so his twin brother, Rudolf, suggested that Alfons go to Nuremberg where Nazi officers were on trial for war crimes. 22 high ranking Nazi officers were on trial but most of the high profile officers such as Eichmann, Goebbels, Himmler and Mengele had already committed suicide, escaped or were killed. The Nazi officers were tried on four counts: planning to commit crimes; crimes against peace; war crimes; and crimes against humanity. All the Nazi officers on trial received death sentences including one of Alfons' mentors in the Hitler Youth.

Alfons began to analyze what had happened to him and his country and knew that he could not reconcile the genocide committed over the past few years. Alfons also reasoned that he and the others in Hitler Youth had been victims as well having been brainwashed by the Nazis.

In October of 1950, Alfons left Germany for Canada hoping to escape his past and start a new life. In 1963, Alfons moved to the United States.

In Chapter 22, Helen and Doris arrived in America, visiting friends in New York for a few days and then on to Chicago to reunite with Helen's parents whom she had not seen for 7 years. Helen and Doris' home in America was a single room and a bathroom shared with several other tenants. The accommodations were meager but they were lucky to have it because housing was at a premium after the war. Jobs were also limited, especially for immigrants, and Helen was fired from her first job with no other reason than she was Jewish. Helen did receive a job from a relative of old friends and she worked in his dress shops for 11 years, eventually managing the largest of 150 stores.

Recovery of physical things was easier than the mental healing for many Jews and Helen found it hard to find people to talk to about the Holocaust. Helen began to study and read and met an attorney named Robert Waterford who admired Helen's initiative and spirit. Helen and Robert married and Helen occasionally wondered what she would do if Siegfried should ever return.

16 years after the war, Helen and Robert traveled to Europe so that Helen could share some of the people and places that had been such a big part of her life. Visiting Amsterdam and Kratzau were especially difficult for Helen but she felt victorious for having survived.

In the Epilogue, Alfons and Helen live in San Diego, California, and collaborate on public speaking events about the war and the Holocaust. In 1980, Helen saw a newspaper article Alfons had written about Hitler Youth and she contacted him, telling



him that she was interested in learning more about the other side of the war. Alfons, too, was interested in the other side of the war and agreed to attend a meeting with Helen and other Holocaust survivors. Alfons was met with hostility but Helen was determined to team up with him to do lectures about their stories.

Helen's and Alfons' lecturing partnership lasted 10 years and they were covered by major news media at the time. As might be expected, Helen and Alfons received much criticism for their work together but they were fueled by the fact that they were each telling the truth and that it must be told. Overall, people were able to understand Alfons' story but forgiveness was slow in coming. Conversely, there were many people who thought that Helen was too forgiving of the German people for the crimes perpetrated on the Jews. Helen and Alfons both agreed that people must know that the Holocaust happened, how it happened, why it happened and that it could happen again.

Analysis

In a final ironic moment, Alfons returned to Nuremberg to witness the trials of some of the Nazi officers for war crimes. It was also Nuremberg where Alfons traveled in 1938 to attend the Nuremberg Party Congress as a member of Hitler Youth. The event was a week long festival dedicated to praising Hitler and Alfons was totally taken in to the Nazi doctrine. So, at the same place where the Third Reich celebrated, it now went down in destruction.

Finally, Alfons was able to view the war and his part in it with some clarity and realized that while he was not aware of the extermination of Jews, he could not justify what had happened. He now saw the Third Reich as perpetrators of murder which was a vastly different perspective from what he had for many years. Alfons saw, too, that he and the others in Hitler Youth had also been victims. They had had no decision in the course their lives would take and they were forced to go to war fueled by the doctrines of a madman. It must be a hard spot to be in when you realize that horrible events took place and you were indirectly involved without your knowledge. Perhaps Alfons' views and behaviors later in his life were his only way of providing some sense of justice and recognition for the wrongs that had been done.

Helen's and Doris' accommodations in Chicago were not much better than the ones they had in Amsterdam immediately after the war. But for whatever they lacked, they had two things: they had freedom and they had each other. Helen's fear of living in America was certainly justified because she did not know the language and had no way to make a living. But Helen had proven herself to be determined and if she could will herself to stay alive in a concentration camp then she could certainly make a life in America.

In yet another twist of fate, Helen and Alfons connected in America and were open and honest with each other about their own experiences during the war. What are the chances that this meeting would have happened? Both Helen and Alfons were at the point in their lives when they were ready to talk about what happened from their own



perspectives and their lectures showed honesty and integrity. Some people were not quite ready for Alfons' defense of himself as part of Hitler Youth but he was entitled to his beliefs about the course of his early life and his life now haunted by the Holocaust. People were also not ready to hear Helen, a Holocaust survivor, forgive Alfons, one of Hitler's soldiers. People expected Helen to be filled with hatred and were baffled to learn that she was not. Perhaps reconciliation and peace are greater than hatred and fear and Helen was sent to tell this message.

Vocabulary

drastically, worthless, barred, neutral, plague, forbidden, splendid, rally, checkpoint, in absentia, vials, cyanide, inhumane, monogrammed, misfortune, honorary, conspirators, atrocities, vengeance, conscience, correspondence, reunion, sympathetic, embarrassing, endured, firsthand, widow, Holocaust, ventured, debris, cruelty, grateful, unthinkable, astonishing, occasional, foe, intrigued, autopsy, skinheads, ignorant, condemn, offend, insanity, rabbi, persisted, charismatic



Important People

Helen Waterford

Helen Waterford is one of the two people whose stories are profiled in *Parallel Journeys*. Helen was born Helen Katz in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1909, to Jewish parents, a German mother and Lithuanian father. Helen loved to learn and travel and had no real interest in typical female pursuits such as marriage. Helen did marry a man she met while traveling, Siegfried Wohlfarth, in 1933 and they had a daughter, Doris, in 1937.

Adolf Hitler's rise to power in the late 1930s impacted Helen and Siegfried's lives as Jews because of anti-Semitic activities inflicted by the Nazis. Siegfried lost his job and he and Helen eventually moved to Amsterdam to escape the oppressive restrictions against Jews in Germany. Conditions worsened for Jews in countries bordering Germany and Helen and Siegfried ultimately decided to go into hiding but not before making the painful decision to give Doris to strangers to save her from the terrors of Hitler's plans to exterminate all Jews. Helen and Siegfried are eventually arrested and taken to a concentration camp. Helen lived to tell her story and even collaborated with Alfons Heck on the topic of forgiveness and compassion regarding the dark period of the Holocaust.

Helen is an amazing person and her optimistic outlook throughout her story is truly inspirational. Helen is an educated person and this may have positioned her better to deal with the horrible adversities she encountered. Helen has a good sense of who she is and was not eager to fall into a lifestyle that others thought might be best for her. Perhaps this allowed Helen to explore options in her life and survive. Helen was particularly devastated by the loss of her daughter, even though it was for a relatively short period of time, but her ability to project what was best for her daughter instead of thinking of her own need to keep her child with her, shows Helen's selfless attitude. Helen's magnanimous spirit also shows in her initiative to contact Alfons and collaborate with him on speaking engagements showcasing their different perspectives on the same war.

Alfons Heck

Alfons Heck is one of the two people whose stories are presented in *Parallel Journeys*. Alfons was born in 1928 in Wittlich, Germany. Alfons lived with his grandmother on her farm when Alfons' parents took his twin brother and moved to Oberhausen, an industrial city where they planned to start a business. The arrangement was supposed to have been temporary but it extended and Alfons was essentially raised by his grandmother. At the age of 6, Alfons entered school where the children were indoctrinated with the beliefs of Adolf Hitler who was rising to power. When he was 10, Alfons joined the massive Hitler Youth program which was a requirement of all German Aryan children.



Alfons learned to idolize Hitler and the Third Reich essentially through unrelenting brainwashing of the superiority and power they would have.

Alfons was a natural born leader and he rose in the ranks easily after advancing to the senior level of Hitler Youth. Alfons believed the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazis and never really considered the plight of the millions of people who suffered under Hitler's regime. This does not necessarily mean that Alfons was a bad person; he was just indoctrinated negatively at such an early age that he did not know any better. Alfons' grandmother tried to caution Alfons in some of his beliefs but the teachings of the Nazis was just too overpowering.

Alfons was an industrious boy and trained to be a glider pilot to advance his military career. The brainwashing of boys in Hitler Youth continued and Alfons became even more fanatic about fighting for the Third Reich, even if that meant death. As the war progressed, though, Alfons began to see his boyhood friends killed in battle, and eventually as the Germans began to lose battles and suffer greater losses, he started to wonder if Germany would ever recover and win the war. Alfons even questioned the loyalty of some of the Nazi officers who began to predict Germany's losing the war and that Hitler's leadership should be questioned. Fortunately, toward the end of the war, an officer and friend of Alfons' told him that it was always a better choice to live for the Fatherland than to die for it. Fortunately, Alfons took this advice at a critical time and he lived to tell his story of what it was like to live during Hitler's regime in the 1930s and 1940s.

Alfons had a very determined personality with a huge initiative to advance in his life. As a teenager, he rose to a high level in the military and the power went to his head and he made ego-driven decisions but this is really to have been expected of someone so young lacking the maturity to weigh all issues and consequences. In his later life, Alfons was able to evaluate his life and why he did the things he did and behaved the way he did. He did not make excuses but provided a framework for his thought patterns and behaviors. Alfons' ability to collaborate with Helen Waterford years after the war show that Alfons did have a compassionate side which he showed while also sharing his own personal truth.

Siegfried Wohlfarth

Siegfried Wohlfarth was born in March of 1909 to strict German Jewish parents and grew up in the city of Frankfurt. Siegfried was a studious boy who became a Certified Public Accountant. Siegfried met Helen Waterford while on holiday in 1932. Before long, Adolf Hitler's anti-Semitic policies forced Jews out of jobs and Siegfried lost his. Siegfried and Helen married anyway in 1933 and eventually had a daughter they named Doris in 1937. When the Nazi restrictions on Jews became unbearable, Siegfried and Helen fled to Amsterdam and went into hiding when the Nazis occupied Holland in 1940. Siegfried and Helen eventually went into hiding until they were arrested in August of 1944.



Siegfried had heard about the mass extermination of Jews at Auschwitz and knew that his and Helen's fates were sealed when they were forced into a train boxcar. Siegfried had an artistic nature and knew that he would not be able to survive the experience. Siegfried and Helen were parted at Birkenau, part of the Auschwitz concentration camp, and Helen never heard from him again but assumed that he had died there.

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler was an Austrian born man who rose to power as a dictator in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. Hitler's profile rose when he appealed to the German people to follow him as he led them out of poverty following World War I. Hitler's fanatic quest for a perfect Aryan race drove him in horrific crimes against groups of people such as Jews, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies and others who did not fit his view of the perfect race of people. Hitler capitalized on the regime of fear he created in the Third Reich and was able to create what was called the final solution to the Jewish situation: the planned extermination of millions of innocent people. Eventually, Hitler was recognized for being a madman and even his own officers tried to assassinate him to no avail. Ultimately, Germany lost power and the war and Hitler committed suicide 12 years to the day of his official introduction as the head of the Nazi party.

Ab Reusink

Ab Reusink was a man who befriended Helen and Siegfried when they lived in Amsterdam. Ab was a Catholic and was not under Nazi suspicion so he could move freely about the area without fear. Ab helped Helen and Siegfried by keeping their household belongings when they went into hiding and then giving them the money when the items were later sold. Ab also offered to keep Doris, Helen and Siegfried's daughter, when they went into hiding but they declined because Ab said he would have to raise the child as a Catholic and Helen and Siegfried did not want Doris raised in any specific religion.

Jo Vis

Jo Vis was a carpenter in Amsterdam who befriended Helen and Siegfried when they decided that they needed to go into hiding to avoid arrest by the Gestapo. Jo and his wife had determined that the only way they could fight the Nazis was to help Jewish people who feared for their lives. Jo was instrumental in finding a place for Helen and Siegfried to leave Doris so that she would be spared death in a concentration camp.

Dr. Josef Mengele

Dr. Josef Mengele, also called "The Angel of Death," was the mastermind behind who lived or died at the concentration camps. Mengele also used concentration camp



prisoners for scientific and biological experimentation. Mengele was pure evil, made even more so because of how he relished his horrific work.

Hermann Goring

Hermann Goring was a high-ranking German officer who was in charge of the German economy and later the commander of the Luftwaffe (air force). Eventually, Goring rose in the Nazi party as second in command to Hitler. Goring was tried at Nuremberg and sentenced to hang but he committed suicide by swallowing a cyanide capsule in his jail cell.

Heinrich Himmler

Heinrich Himmler was a high-ranking officer in the Nazi party and the creator of the feared Gestapo police force, a branch of the SS. After Germany's defeat in the war, Himmler ordered all the concentration camp crematoria destroyed so that there would be no evidence of the horrors that occurred there.

Doris Wohlfarth

Although Doris did not have an active part in the story, she played a significant role in the lives of many of the adults who knew her. Doris' parents, Helen and Siegfried, agonized about the decision to leave her with strangers but they knew her fate would surely be death at a concentration camp if they had not. After the war, Helen and Doris had difficulties adjusting to each other again after they had been apart for so long but eventually they moved to the United States and began their lives all over again.



Objects/Places

Wittlich, Germany

Wittlich, Germany, is the town where Alfons Heck grew up. Alfons' family had originally come from France and settled in Wittlich which is near the French border. Alfons returned to Wittlich toward the end of the war and the town had been destroyed by the liberating American forces.

Pogrom

A pogrom is a violent attack or movement aimed at destroying a group of people; in this case the pogroms were directed at Jews, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses and other "undesirables".

Frankfurt, Germany

Frankfurt is the largest city in Germany and also Helen's childhood home.

Blitzkrieg

Blitzkrieg means "lightning war" and was used by the Germans to conduct surprise attacks on their enemies during the war.

Amsterdam

Amsterdam is the capital of Holland and the city where Helen and Siegfried fled during the war to hide from the Nazis.

Auschwitz

Auschwitz was a group of concentration camps in Poland where Jews were sent to be exterminated.

West Wall

The West Wall was the heavily guarded line of defense on the border of Western Germany. After the D-Day invasion, the German troops struggled to hold the West Wall barrier from advancing Allied troops.



A25254

A25254 was the identification number tattooed on Helen's arm at the concentration camp.

Birkenau

Birkenau was one of 40 concentration camps at Auschwitz in Poland. Helen and Siegfried were taken to Birkenau from their hiding place in Amsterdam.

Nuremberg, Germany

Nuremberg, Germany, was the site of the trials held after the war to determine guilt or innocence of Nazi officials.

Crematoria

The crematoria were the places at the concentration camps where the dead bodies were taken to be burned.



Themes

Good vs. Evil

The conflict of good vs. evil is common in literature simply because it is common in life. Most human beings are capable of both and are able to live with the qualities in a balanced mode. However, there are times when extreme people or extreme circumstances force evil out into the world and good people are hard pressed to counter it. This is definitely the situation with Hitler and the Third Reich. Hitler embodied a form of evil never seen before as he wreaked hell on earth for so many people. For a long time the good people were essentially powerless to fight him but ultimately good did prevail and evil was vanquished.

It may never be known why Hitler had such a core of evil and how he was able to conduct such atrocities in the world. Most normal people could never even conceive of the idea of obliterating whole groups of people just because they were considered to be inferior. So, where does that evil come from? Most people have a filter that would not allow them to even think the hideous thoughts as Hitler did, let alone act on them. Regardless of where the evil started in Hitler, it was allowed to perpetuate by people surrounding him. There is a lot to be said for mass and crowd hysteria when an idea is put forth and it gets a foothold when there are not enough people to kill it.

As counter to Hitler's madness, there were good people who lived during this time who did what they could to stop the genocide but they were limited by fear of what may happen to them. Hitler's wrath knew no end and logic had no place in his world of maniacal machinations. So, how far will good people go to stop evil when they see it? Actually it seems to depend on the people. Most people have a code they live by whether it's based in family values, spiritual doctrine or other influences. And it is probably safe to say that risk is very different for different people which is what allowed some people to rise to the occasion to help the Jews while others shrank back. It is difficult to measure human decency. Most people have it, some more than others.

Man's Inhumanity to Man

Sometimes it is difficult to explain some people's behavior, especially when that behavior is especially heinous and destructive. This is the case of Hitler and the Nazis who inflicted unspeakable horror and pain on Jews and other undesirable people during the Holocaust—the ultimate case of man's inhumanity to man. What allows some people to want to destroy or critically harm other fellow human beings? And this destruction does not have to be only in the physical sense. Emotional and intellectual harm can be just as inhumane, just as destructive.

In the case of Hitler and Nazi rule, the people were drawn in by a charismatic madman who initially improved the lot of the German people. As momentum for Nazi rule grew, it



was easier for people to participate because the doctrine had been established and most people tend to go along with the group when faced with critical situations. It has often been said in context of the Holocaust that “evil is allowed to happen when good men do nothing.” That is a theory that can be debated based on the fear of good people and the lack of recourse they had during that time.

It is hard to fathom someone being able to make the decision about which people will die and which will live at least for another day. In the case of the Nazis, these decisions were based on certain rules, but in some cases people were killed on the whim of a Nazi officer. Can it really be true that those Nazis were just following rules as they claimed? Or were there some who secretly delighted in being allowed to inflict horrific pain and death? Probably all that can be said is that man’s inhumanity to man exists, it always will and it will be up to good people to do what they can to stop it when they see it.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is hatred, prejudice or discrimination against Jewish people. This was the core of Hitler's Nazi regime and he committed atrocities against other human beings based on these beliefs. Anti-Semitism was not new under Hitler's rule, it had been practiced in countries around the world for centuries, but it was Hitler who took the hatred to the extreme with the Holocaust. Prior to his rise to power in Germany, Hitler wrote a book called *Mein Kampf* in which he stated that Jews had created a conspiracy to take over the world. This, of course, was counter to Hitler's own plans so he needed to create a case against the Jews or obliterate them. He did both. It is important to note that the Nazis did not just view Jews on the basis of their religion but on their ethnicity as a people. In Hitler's eyes, the Jews were an inferior people and needed to be destroyed in order for his Aryan race to take over.

In the story, Anti-Semitism is at first revealed in the discrimination of the Jews through job loss, destruction of businesses and lack of educational resources. This also included mass harassment of Jews in newspapers with threatening articles. Probably the climax of all this anti-Semitic behavior was the Kristallnacht when the Nazis destroyed synagogues, Jewish stores, schools, and homes while also injuring and killing thousands of Jews. The Jewish people had heard rumors of Hitler’s genocide plans but could not believe them to be true. But Hitler was single-minded in his purpose and the mass killings of Jews began and continued until early 1945 when the concentration camps were liberated by the Russians and Allied forces.

After the horror of the Jewish holocaust, it would seem that people would drop their anti-Semitic beliefs or at least soften them a bit but Helen experienced anti-Semitic hatred on her long trip from Birkenau back to Holland. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism still exists today in many forms and maybe all that can be done is to fight against it on an individual level and resist it should it ever exhibit on such a massive scale again.



Blind Ambition

Blind ambition is simply the pursuit of a goal with such single-minded purpose that it obliterates any other view or perspective. It is easy to see that Hitler had blind ambition in his rise to power and he would let nothing stand in his way, especially the extermination of the Jews whom he blamed for all of Germany's problems. Hitler wanted to make Germany a world power again and he needed to eliminate anything or anyone that could possibly compromise that. Hitler wanted to create a perfect Aryan race of people and that did not include Jews, gypsies, communists, Jehovah's witnesses, people with deformities and more. In his blind ambition, Hitler began a mass genocide of these people whom he considered to be inferior.

Hitler's blind ambition can also be seen in his indoctrination of German children into Nazi beliefs. This unrelenting brainwashing accomplished his goals of making the young people excited to be part of the new Germany as well as declaring their undying loyalty to the fuhrer. Hitler was very astute in his machinations of indoctrinating the children by providing them and their families with things that had been lacking in Germany since the end of World War I. The Hitler Youth was a perfect example of blind ambition on a grand scale. Not only did Hitler accomplish his goals of engendering loyalty, he created blind ambition in the young people who were now single-minded in their advance of Germany as well.

Alfons is a great example of blind ambition in the story. Not only did he idolize Hitler, but he had his own ambitions to rise within the ranks of Hitler Youth and join the Luftwaffe one day, his ultimate goal. Alfons considered the war years the best of this life at the time and he was singularly driven to accomplish his goals.

Blind ambition means that consequences and repercussions are not considered and this is what happened in the case of exterminating the Jews. In their pursuit of goals, the Nazis did not consider what they were really doing--obliterating millions of innocent people. Even Alfons said that he knew the Jews were disappearing but he did not really pay much attention. He thought Auschwitz was a farm and there's nothing really horrible about being sent to work on a farm. It never occurred to Alfons to ask what was happening to the Jews because he had been brainwashed into blind ambition by the madman Hitler.

Reconciliation

The theme of reconciliation does not really appear until the end of the story but it is an important one to consider for the book. Reconciliation is the act of bringing together people or factions which once had vastly differing viewpoints or disagreements. Clearly this is what has happened with Helen and Alfons by the end of the book. Not only have they come together privately to discuss their personal growth, they have taken their messages public with lectures and speaking engagements.



Reconciliation happens every day after people settle disagreements and misunderstandings but in the case of Helen and Alfons, the damage inflicted on both of them seems almost unforgivable but they try very hard to achieve it. Probably Helen had the biggest gap to close in reconciling with Alfons or anyone who had been associated with the Nazis during the war. Helen and her family and friends lost everything, some even dying through suicide or extermination, due to the mad doctrine of Hitler and the Nazi party. If anyone would have a valid case for maintaining hatred it would be Helen and the other Jews for the horrors they experienced. However, Helen was able to get to a place where she did not blame people like Alfons for what they did during the war. It seems incredible that Helen could reach this emotional and intellectual place of forgiveness but Helen is an exceptional person and certainly a role model for reconciliation.

Alfons, too, was a victim during the war having been brainwashed by the Nazis, starting as a young boy. Now, many years after the war, Alfons thinks that he and all the other German children were victimized because they had no choice about what their beliefs were to be and where they were to place their loyalties. Although Alfons does not forgive Hitler, he does want forgiveness from Helen and other Jews for what happened to them. Obviously Alfons is not responsible for all the Nazi atrocities but he wants to make it clear that he did not know what was going on and he is sorry for the pain and destruction. As a noble gesture, Alfons is able to be honest with Helen and cooperate with her on the speaking engagements and hopefully win understanding, if not forgiveness, from the people who hear his story.

Extraordinary Courage

The theme of extraordinary courage was exhibited many times over in the book primarily by the Jewish people who had to live every day in fear for their lives under Hitler's rule. Just knowing that you and your family could be exterminated at any time was a horrible mental anguish yet these brave people persevered in their faith and in doing all they could to stay alive. Also showing remarkable courage during this time were those people called the Righteous Gentiles. These people risked their own safety by aiding Jews in escape plans or finding them hiding places so that they would not be found and sent to a concentration camp.

These people showed exceptional courage by putting themselves at risk for the sake of other people, some who were probably strangers.

It is hard to know where courage of this magnitude comes from and why some people have it and some do not. Perhaps it goes back to the philosophy that "evil prevails when good men do nothing." But what makes some people step up with courage? Is it a personal code? Part of a religious belief? It is probably different for each person and each situation. Not only did people like the Righteous Gentiles help during this time, but other individuals and groups did what they could quietly, mustering unwavering courage to help people in desperate situations.



The Jewish people also showed great courage and dignity during this time of terror. They helped each other the best they could and withstood punishments, even death with remarkable control. What is it that allows people to display such courage under such horrific circumstances? Perhaps we will never know unless faced with life or death situations. There is a type of dignity that comes with extraordinary courage and the Jewish people maintained theirs despite unspeakable terror.

In the end, both Alfons and Helen showed extraordinary courage on their lecture tours because they were both set up for scrutiny about their current views on the Holocaust and reconciliation. It would have been easier for Helen and Alfons to have made their private forgiveness and gone on their ways but they thought it was important to tell their story to the world despite the backlash it created at times. Their need to have the truth revealed outweighed any possible personal discomfort they could experience and this took extraordinary courage as well.

Obedience

Obedience was demanded of the German people during Hitler's rule. It began with parents obeying to give up their children to be indoctrinated with Nazi doctrine all in service to the fatherland. Children had no say in whether they would participate and parents had no control over whether they wanted their children to join Hitler Youth. This must have been excruciatingly difficult, especially for those parents who disagreed with Hitler's policies. Obedience came with a steep price--the sacrifice of their children to the cause.

Complete obedience was also expected from Hitler's officers and army. Everything that was done was in service to the fuhrer with no questions asked. At the beginning of the Third Reich, it was easy to obey Hitler because conditions were improving in Germany and everyone was prospering, After a few years into the war, however, the military was depleted, soldiers were exhausted and tired of war and thoughts began to rise that Hitler did not know what he was doing. It seemed as if Germany could not win the war and they did not want to be part of a losing proposition. Those who did dare to question Hitler's sanity or methodologies and attempted to assassinate him were disposed of and served as examples to anyone else considering disobedience.

Alfons is grounded and punished when he disregards his commander's orders during glider training one day. Alfons thought he knew best in the situation and quickly learned from his commander that orders must be obeyed for the good of all. Fortunately for Alfons, he received a reprieve but disobeying orders during wartime situations was punishable by death.

Of course, those who lived--and died--with complete obedience were those Jews, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses and others who were exterminated by the Nazis. These people had no say over their circumstances once Hitler ordered the genocide. The only real disobedience they could exhibit was escaping from Hitler's grasp by moving to another country or hiding out and trying not to get caught. This could be

considered a passive resistance of sorts but it was all these people had at their disposal.

Styles

Structure

Parallel Journeys is a nonfiction book that blends text from the author with passages taken from books written by Helen and Alfons. The author provides factual, substantive content that moves the story along and the inserts from Helen and Alfons add personal touches and perspectives. For example, in Chapter 3 the author provides information about the Nuremberg Party Congress and this provides solid information. However, by including verbiage from Alfons such as this, "You, my youth," he shouted, with his eyes seeming to stare right at me, "are our nation's most precious guarantee for a great future. You are destined to be the leaders of a glorious new order under National Socialism! You, my youth," he screamed hoarsely, "never forget that one day you will rule the world." This personal touch adds so much to the story and adds a sense of drama that would not be possible without it.

The book is structured in chapters dedicated alternately to Alfons' and Helen's stories on their parallel journeys. The author wants to give the reader a sense of what is happening to each of these people in their opposite places of the same war. For example, at the same time that Helen and her family are suffering from anti-Semitic attacks, Alfons is learning how to be a soldier in Hitler Youth. Each chapter moves the story along from the alternating perspectives of Alfons and Helen.

The author also provides an introduction to the book where she explains who Helen and Alfons are and how she structured the book to enhance the reading experience. She also provides the titles of the books written by Alfons and Helen for further reading if interested. The author also makes it clear that everything in the book is true, validating its nonfiction genre.

A Postscript is also included in the book which provides some factual detail of Alfons' and Helen's life long after the war. Alfons was featured in an HBO documentary about being a member of Hitler Youth and Helen's story is shared at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Perspective

The book is written both in the third person perspective and the first person perspective. The author uses the third person limited perspective to share the story's basic content. Essentially, the third person point of view means that the author tells the story from the perspective of a narrator. You can recognize the third person perspective because the author uses pronouns such as "she" or "he". For example, in Chapter 1 the author writes, "In growing numbers, people were now listening to Hitler's ideas. He promised them a way out of poverty. He promised to restore pride in themselves and in their country. And--perhaps most important--he gave them someone to blame for Germany's



troubles: the Jews." This is the third person perspective because the author is telling the information from facts she has learned.

The perspective for the book's content is third person limited which means that the narrator is telling the story but has limited insight into the events personally. The author does not know the thoughts of those whose actions are mentioned and she cannot supply any of her own thoughts because it is not her story.

There are also major portions of the book which are told from the first person point of view. These are the sections in which Helen and Alfons tell their stories. You can tell first person perspective because of the use of the words "I" or "we." While this is very authentic and provides a personalized view, it does limit the reader in that the story can only be told from the narrator's single view. For example, in Chapter 2, Helen states, "I was a happy teenager like my girl friends, with one exception. I went on to the university, something my mother never understood." Helen is sharing her story from her point of view as the narrator of her sections throughout the book, just as Alfons is the narrator of his sections of the book.

Tone

Basically, tone in literature means the author's attitude toward the work. Tone can be funny, serious, sad, angry, instructional or whatever mood the author is trying to convey in the work. Because of the subject matter covered in *Parallel Journeys*, the author uses a serious and educational tone. She shares a lot of factual information about history in the book which calls for an educational tone. And because the subject matter is important, and even grave at times, she appropriately uses a serious tone. It would be disrespectful to share content and stories of this nature using a funny or sarcastic tone of voice.

The sections that come from books written by Alfons and Helen have their individual tones as well. Alfons, especially in the beginning of his story, had an elated tone as he talked about Hitler and what he was doing for Germany. As Alfons entrenched even further into Nazism, his tone became more confident and determined and he was still elated, though, when speaking about Hitler. Toward the end of the book when Germany has lost the war, Alfons' tone is understandably low key and defeated. In essence, tone mimics the mood of the author and it is easy to see the shifts in Alfons' progression during the book.

Helen's moods were also very indicative of her moods as her story progressed through the book. Initially, Helen showed an optimistic attitude as she talked about her studies and what she wanted to do with her life. However, as the pall of the Nazis fell over her life, Helen's tone transitioned to anxious and frightened. Toward the end of Helen's part of the story, she is almost defeated at the concentration camp and it shows in the low energy of her words. At the end, though, Helen had survived unimaginable horrors and told her story to the world in a confident tone, and chose not to take a victim's tone with her words.



Quotes

You mark my words," my grandfather cried, waving his ever-present pipe as we listened. "They're going to hand this country over to that crazy Austrian.

-- Alfons' Grandfather (Chapter 1 paragraph 15)

Importance: The people in Germany were so thrilled to be coming out of poverty due to Hitler's changes that they ignored the ways in which he was accomplishing them. People like Alfons' grandfather could read between the lines and knew what was coming for the country under Hitler's rule.

No German boy can ever be true friends with a Jewish boy. No matter how nice he seems, he'll grow up to be your enemy.

-- Herr Becker (Chapter 1 paragraph 31)

Importance: Alfons' teacher, Herr Becker, instructs his German students to stay away from Jewish children and to reject them as friends. The young Germans take this hateful information to heart because it is delivered by their teacher, an authority figure in their lives.

Before which everything else in my short life paled... It would bind me to Adolf Hitler until the bitter end.

-- Alfons Heck (Chapter 3 paragraph 13)

Importance: Alfons joined the Hitler Youth organization in 1938 and was taken in by the pomp and glory of the movement. It was the intention of the Nazis to draw the young people under the power of the party so that they would never abandon their loyalty to Hitler.

I promise in the Hitler Youth to do my duty at all times in love and faithfulness to help the Fuhrer--so help me God. Our banner means more to us than death.

-- Hitler Youth (Chapter 3 paragraph 2)

Importance: The members of Hitler Youth were caught up in the glamor and glory of the organization, pledging their loyalty to Hitler and the Nazi party. Little did they know that many would pay the ultimate price--death--during this time of the rise of the Nazi regime.

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.

-- Winston Churchill (Chapter 6 paragraph 5)

Importance: When Germany invaded Holland, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, knew that Britain would have to engage in a full-fledged war and he did not think he could direct the country through it. Winston Churchill replaced Chamberlain with little fanfare and this statement shows his fundamental approach to his horrible task.



At that time I obeyed my orders without thinking. I just did as I was told. That's where I found my.... fulfillment. It made no difference to me what the orders were.

-- Adolf Eichmann (Chapter 8 paragraph 29)

Importance: The quote from Adolf Eichmann reinforces the cold-blooded mentality of him and many Nazi officers. To be so cavalier about the terror he inflicted is almost unbelievable and inhuman. He also claimed later that he would go to his grave happy in the knowledge that he had helped to kill 6 million Jews.

The important thing to me," Himmler admitted, "is that as many Jews as humanly possible be removed to the east.

-- Heinrich Himmler (Chapter 10 paragraph 16)

Importance: Himmler was a high-ranking German officer and head of the feared Gestapo. He considered it his mission to facilitate the extermination of the Jews and he made that a priority for his organization. This quote reflects the callous and cavalier nature of Himmler as he casually did his evil work.

What kind of a mother are you," she screamed in outrage, "to separate yourself from your child?

-- Helen's neighbor, Mrs. Safir (Chapter 12 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote from Mrs. Safir pierced Helen's heart because she was not sure if she had done the right thing by sending Doris to live with strangers. Helen was haunted about her decision and it was particularly painful for her to hear Mrs. Safir's accusation. As it turned out, Helen's decision was the right one because the Safir family all perished during the war.

You are from the Moselland, my boy," he said. "I know I can count on you.

-- Adolf Hitler (Chapter 13 paragraph 57)

Importance: Hitler meets with the top ranking Hitler Youth in charge of defending Germany against the invading Allies at a secret meeting to motivate them in their roles. When Hitler personally acknowledges Alfons with this quote, Alfons knows that no other moment in his life will ever top this one.

There is NO way out for any of us but through the chimney. We call this our journey to heaven.

-- A prisoner at Birkenau (Chapter 14 paragraph 23)

Importance: Helen has just recently arrived at the Birkenau concentration camp and is desperate to find a way to escape. One day she asks a prisoner who has been there awhile and his response is matter of fact and so bleak that Helen is overwhelmed with despair.

I want you to remember, Alf, that dying for the Fatherland is not as noble as living for it, no matter what anybody tells you. For God's sake, keep that in mind when the time



comes and you have a choice.
-- Hans Leiwitz (Chapter 15 paragraph 16)

Importance: The quote is important because it was spoken by one of Alfons' superiors. Alfons is surprised to hear a Nazi officer speak in terms which Alfons would consider to be treasonous.

"Do you think we faked these pictures?" he screamed at me, referring to photos of the death camps. "Those murders are a burden you'll never shake off in your lifetime."
-- American Lieutenant (Chapter 19 paragraph 14)

Importance: Alfons is required to report in to an American officer twice a week at the end of the war. One day Alfons talks to a lieutenant who is incredulous that Alfons bought into Hitler's propaganda and that the German people allowed him to kill so many people. Alfons challenges the veracity of the lieutenant's claims and the photos of the death camps. The lieutenant believes that the guilt will follow Alfons all his life. Many years later, Alfons learns that the lieutenant was right.



Topics for Discussion

Belief in Hitler

Why were the German people so willing to believe in Adolf Hitler during his rise to power? What was going on in Germany in the 1930s that allowed Hitler to be accepted by the country? Was Hitler honest and up front about his true objectives for his strategies? Explain.

Responsibility

The German children were essentially brainwashed into believing the points taught by the Nazis as soon as they entered school. Take Alfons, for example, who idolized Hitler and knew that he would for the rest of his life. Later in his life, Alfons learns the gravity of not only Hitler's impact on the families affected by the genocide but also on the German children. Do you think Alfons felt the impact of what he learned as a child? Did he regret it in his later life? Was he sad? Did he feel guilty? Can Alfons and the other German children of Hitler Youth be blamed for their actions? Why or why not?

Parallel Journeys

Explain why this book is called *Parallel Journeys*. What is the author trying to get the reader to understand in the book? Are there any other titles you might suggest for the book?

Hitler's Suicide

How do you feel about Hitler's suicide? Was this a final cowardly act from a coward? Or is this the behavior of a true leader? What punishment would you have meted out to Hitler if he had been captured alive? Why?

The High Road

Helen reached out to Alfons after she saw a newspaper article he had written. What do you think prompted Helen to contact Alfons given her history as a Holocaust survivor? How do you think that first conversation between them unfolded? Do you think Alfons would have contacted Helen if the situation had been reversed? Why do you think Helen chose to take the high road when she could have adopted a victim status and stayed forever silent?



Anger toward Helen

Helen was often criticized for doing the speaking engagements with Alfons. Why were people so angry with Helen at the time? What was Helen's position on the topic? Are you mad at Helen? Are you mad at Alfons? Why or why not?

Unspeakable tragedy

Helen endured many indignities and horrors at the hands of the Nazis. What do you think was the height of despair for her? Why?

Helen and Doris' relationship

Imagine that you are Helen and Siegfried's daughter, Doris. How would you feel about your parents leaving you with a strange family when you were so young? Do you think you could understand at some point? Why did Doris say she hated her mother when actually her mother saved her life? Explain.

Was it real?

Amazingly, there are still people who believe the Holocaust never happened. Do you feel there could be any information to substantiate this viewpoint? After having read *Parallel Journeys*, how would you respond to anyone contesting the veracity of the Holocaust?

Alfons and Hitler

Describe how Alfons felt about being part of Hitler Youth. Why was this so appealing to Alfons? How did the personal comments from Hitler affect Alfons? When do you think Hitler's influence began to diminish for Alfons? What made Alfons begin to change his mind about his one time idol?