



## Parallel Journeys

*Eleanor H. Ayer, Alfons Heck, Helen Waterford*

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## **Parallel Journeys** Eleanor H. Ayer , Alfons Heck , Helen Waterford

She was a young German Jew. He was an ardent member of the Hitler Youth. This is the story of their parallel journey through World War II. Helen Waterford and Alfons Heck were born just a few miles from each other in the German Rhineland. But their lives took radically different courses: Helen's to the Auschwitz extermination camp; Alfons to a high rank in the Hitler Youth. While Helen was hiding in Amsterdam, Alfons was a fanatic believer in Hitler's "master race." While she was crammed in a cattle car bound for the death camp Auschwitz, he was a teenage commander of frontline youth troops, ready to fight and die for the glory of Hitler and the Fatherland. This book tells both of their stories, side-by-side, in an overwhelming account of the nightmare that was WWII. The riveting stories of these two remarkable people must stand as a powerful lesson to us all.

## **Parallel Journeys Details**

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Author : Eleanor H. Ayer , Alfons Heck , Helen Waterford

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## From Reader Review Parallel Journeys for online ebook

### **Jessica says**

There isn't a negative rating...

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### **Christopher Hicks says**

This was an excellent book. It told the two separate stories of two people living in the same area during WW2 one Jewish, one German. I've read many books about Holocaust survivors and this lady's story is equally heartbreakingly gripping but I've never read a story from the perspective of a former Nazi youth. I found his story to be extremely interesting and just the fact that they were basically brainwashed from such a young age and under such mind control from Hitler and his people is incredibly scary. The things that were endured on all sides of that war were horrific. I think this is a very important YA book about this subject and would recommend it to anyone to read.

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### **Valerie Dobbs says**

Many students start learning about the holocaust in middle school and do a vast number of projects throughout high school. Being one of those students, I was not very enthusiastic about reading Parallel Journeys for my Novel class. I knew it would be the same stories I've learned over and over. I was obviously mistaken. Ayer does a fantastic job of taking the reader back to the beginning of the war in the late 1930s to travel with Helen and Alfons throughout the war. My attitude quickly changed toward this book as my mind was opened up by their stories. Especially Alfons' story. Being a seventeen year old I haven't been exposed to many Nazis, mostly Jews like Anne Frank, so I learned a whole new perspective. I am glad there are people like Helen and Alfons to speak out and teach us about our history even if it is the part of history we are not proud of. I always love learning about characters in books and how things play out and this being first biography I read I was excited when I realized that there is more for me to learn. There are many survivors of the Holocaust and an endless amount I can learn about this part of our history. Whether you are a history person or not this book has a lot to offer and everyone should read it.

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### **Sarah Grace Grzy says**

This is a hard book to rate, so I think I am going to skip the rating and just review it.

This was a very accurate, real life, and therefore sometimes slightly gruesome account of a young boy in the Hitler Youth, and a Jewish girl\woman in her fight for her life, and the lives of her husband and daughter. It was very fascinating and made me want to keep reading. But at the same time, it was very hard to get through because of the sheer bleakness portrayed. WWII was not a happy time for many people in Europe, to put it mildly. The desperation and fear of these times for people like the Jews, and yet the exhilaration and thrilling excitement for followers of Hitler, particularly the Hitler Youth. It's just mind-blowing, really. Surprisingly, throughout most of the book, I felt a compassion and sympathy for Alfons. It is so sad that

someone can be so brainwashed and blinded by the lies of the Enemy that they would blindly follow such a person as Hitler, and give their whole-hearted dedication to said person. And, of course, Helen's story also broke my heart.

I loved how the author included frequent snippets from both of the character's autobiographies. It lent a more personal aspect to the otherwise simple relaying of facts.

Not recommended for anyone under the age of 15 or for sensitive persons. I was in tears numerous times just at the numbers. It was a very good and well written account, but definitely not something I would read again!

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### **Debbi says**

A true story or stories as this is two people's journey through World War II. The first is a young man who grows up in a small village and like all German children he is brainwashed by Nazism and inducted into the Hitler Youth at 10-years-old. The other story starts with a young Jewish girl about the time Hitler starts his propaganda campaign against the Jews. The book goes back and forth between the two but stays current date wise as it goes from the early thirties when Hitler first rose to power clear through the war and beyond. Very accurate and told a lot about the war that I did not know or had forgotten. I didn't know that Germany invaded France so early in the war or that Hitler ordered his Hitler Youth to fight even after he had killed himself. Excellent book.

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### **Hannah Mead says**

One girl. Hunted because of her heritage. Shamed because of her faith. Treated like dirt, like less-than-human. Shut up in a death camp.

One boy. Honoured because of his heritage. Held up as a worthy example because of his actions. Revered as a loyal follower. Shut up in an army.

Two very different stories, both parallel to each other on the timeline of history. They might have been friends, they might have grown up together, if it were not for one thing - Hitler and his insane ambition to rule the world.

She was a Jew. He was an aryan. She was deemed evil. He was brainwashed to believe that. They were both children growing up in Germany, but oh what different paths their journeys would take.

Parallel Journeys chronicles the stories of two dramatically different stories of two German youths. I was very interested by all the Hitler Youth information, as that is not an organization I had known much about previously. I wouldn't say that this book is an incredibly captivatingly written book – I have read a lot of books about WWII, so I knew a lot about the events it described in it already. However, I appreciated the unique perspective of the two parallel journeys of the teens, and I did learn a lot about the Hitler Youth movement. I'm giving this book 3\* out of 5 and recommending it for 13+

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### **Jessica says**

What a wonderful book club discussion we had! My Top 5 Take-Homes: #1 Learn from history so we don't have to live through the horrors first hand. #2 I am so grateful for my blankets on my comfortable bed in my beautifully furnished, heated home. I'm thankful to eat as much food as I could ever want. I am immeasurably blessed to have all of my family with me every day, safe and sound. #3 I will never know how brave or resilient I am until I have to be. #4 Unanswered question: What am I doing to make the world a better place right now? #5 "It seems impossible to me that living under one sky, without hate, would not be the wish of any human being." "The murder of eleven million people in the Holocaust began very simply with prejudice, minor harassment. if you allow harassment to grow and fester, if you do nothing to stop it, then you become one of the perpetrators." "... hate is a boomerang that only destroys the sender."

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### **Kimba Tichenor says**

As the title suggests, the author interweaves the writings of two young Germans who lived within miles of each other but had very different experiences of World War II. Helen Waterford, a young Jewish mother, escaped Nazi Germany only to be captured in the Netherlands and sent to an extermination camp in Poland. Alfons Heck, only six years old when Hitler first came to power, became a high-ranking officer in the Hitler Youth. Many years after the war, Helen Waterford and Alfons Heck would meet in San Diego. For ten years, they visited schools, synagogues and churches together to share their experiences of Nazi Germany. These lectures were not always well-received; Heck came under attack from American Neo-Nazi groups for dishonoring the memory of their hero Hitler. Helen encountered hostile Jewish audiences, who felt that her association with Heck (an admitted former Hitler Youth fanatic) dishonored the memories of those murdered during the Holocaust. They could not understand why she did not hate all Germans and asked her what did she expect to gain by not hating them. How could she forgive them? To this, she responded that she had not forgiven anyone for the crimes committed against the Jewish people. She did not believe that it was up to her to forgive, that if it were possible it "would be up to the six million who were murdered." However, she also believed that hating Germans or Nazis was not the answer, because as she had learned "hating is a boomerang that only destroys the sender. I want to build peace not feed the flames of never ending destruction" (234). Their shared goal was to speak for those who had died and to warn that what happened in Germany could happen in any nation "where people hate those who are different."

The book's intended audience appears to be young adults. In presenting the stories and actual writings of Helen Waterford and Alfons Heck, Ayer provides general information on Nazi Germany, WWII, and the Holocaust in plain, simple to understand language. This background information is intended to contextualize her subjects' experience and clarify the firsthand accounts of the author's two subjects. Unfortunately, the transitions between background information and eye witness accounts are not always smooth. In some places, the various narrative voices, i.e. Elizabeth Ayer, Helen Waterford, and Alfons Heck become indistinguishable, making it difficult to know who is speaking. In other places, the author's voice feels intrusive, interrupting Heck and Waterford's powerful firsthand accounts with unnecessary commentary. For this reason, I have given this book a 4, rather than a 5.

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### **Kelsey Wright says**

Parallel Journeys is a book about World War 2 where Eleanor Ayer gives a description about two different

people during the time, Alfons Heck and Helen Waterford. Helen was a Jewish girl who went into hiding in Amsterdam against the Nazis and Alfons was a German child who became a high ranking Nazi official during the time period in Germany. This book is great at giving information, feelings, and stories over the tragic incidents in Germany over The Holocaust and World War 2. If you are interested in the history of Germany during this time period then I would definitely recommend this book to you. Although, if you are like me and are not too interested in history, then this book may not be that interesting to you. All together, this is an important time in history for everyone so it is definitely worth reading to get a good understanding of this time.

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### **Kellee says**

If you follow my reviews, you probably know that I lack in my history education. However, I have been fascinated (and appalled) by the history of World War II since I was a young girl and my grandfather would tell me stories of his time on the front and as a POW. Throughout my life, I have read many novels about WWII, but it wasn't until last year when I read *The Boy Who Dared* and *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti that I began to learn about the other side of the story. The way that Hitler manipulated and brainwashed such a huge population of young people is terrifying. I had not realized the cult-ness of Nazism until reading those books. I always thought it was just a bunch of evil people; never did it occur to me that good people were talked into doing bad things.

After hearing about my new historical knowledge, a friend of mine recommended this book and lent it to me. And the horrors that are found within this book takes my historical education of WWII and the Holocaust to a whole different level. *Parallel Journeys* is written by Eleanor Ayer, but she uses parts of three autobiographies throughout: *Commitment to the Dead: One Woman's Journey Toward Understanding* by Helen Waterford, a Holocaust survivor, as well as *The Burden of Hitler's Legacy* and *Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika* by Alfons Heck, a Hitler Youth officer during the war. Eleanor Ayers brilliantly intertwines the two stories and chronologically takes us through their parallel journeys. If all books that taught history were as intelligently woven as this book, we would have no problem teaching our children history.

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### **Qt says**

Very interesting and engrossing book, following the experiences of Helen Waterford and Alfons Heck, both before, during, and after the war; quotations from both of them are used frequently throughout the book. My one complaint is that it's not always instantly clear who is "speaking" in the quotations.

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### **Mickenzie says**

*Parallel Journeys* was, at first, just another novel about the Holocaust that I have repeatedly learned about in school. And to be honest, I hated it in the beginning. But as I progressed further into the book, I realized that the two very opposite perspectives this story is told from makes it a phenomenal read. It was heartfelt, bitter, angry, and every other emotion in between. I was surprised when I realized it took a different approach to teaching about the Holocaust. It took on a better one. I enjoyed this book very much and I recommend it to any history buff; there are a lot of solid facts.

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### **Ezra says**

Who has read this book? I'm truthfully surprised our teachers don't have it on the books for the year. I love Night but this book beats it by the history, dates, pictures and real diary pieces from the two protagonists during their lives in the holocaust. I have read this book about 3 times and it is just one of those books where you find new ideas each read. Parallel Journeys basically describes the book but even so here is more. Alfred Heck, a high Nazi Youth at the age 15 and Helen Waterford, a Jew are living both through the time of the Holocaust, obviously one effected more negatively than the other. They both have to learn how to survive either allowed or watched by the Nazi. Though they never meet, they both go through horrifying life experiences that make you wonder how a world was blinded by all of this. My favorite quote in fact is this: "There are none so blind as those who will not see" -old english proverb. This basically sums up that fact the the horrors concerning the world can only be as bad as those who make believe they are not there. I love this quote and believe that all should strive to do the opposite. I encourage us youths to read this book for enlightenment and to also be ahead of the game in Global Studies :) The world is too big for just one type of book, I recommend this book to the world who find history intriguing and especially the holocaust. There are no regrets after this book, TRUST!

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### **Alissa says**

I am always sad and emotionally spent when I finish a book about World War 2. Such a senseless waste of human life and so much hatred. This book gave a good overall summary of Germany's involvement in World War 2. It was also interesting in that it gave us one point of view from someone that was in the Hitler Youth. That is a perspective I haven't read much of and it gives me more insight into the fictional book, The Boy at the Top of the Mountain, which I read earlier this year that deals with a zealous youth devoted to Hitler. I really liked how it took both that perspective and the perspective of a Jew who survived Auschwitz and intertwined them using excerpts in their own words. I also really liked learning about how they teamed up in the 1980's and lectured together. That was very interesting.

2017 Popsugar Reading Challenge #8 A book with multiple authors

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### **Tom says**

I picked this book up on a whim, thinking it would be yet another recounting of Germany during the war. This book illuminates the personal devastation that Hitler unleashed on the innocent people of Europe. The book, in alternating chapters, recounts the personal stories of two of those victims. One of them is Helen Waterford, a Jewish survivor of the concentration camps. Her story is in some sense predictable, because it has been told so many times in so many variants by so many survivors. While each story is unique, as is each life lost, the stories have been told so many times that I come to expect a certain sameness from them. Helen, through the ghostwriter of this book, though, makes her story immediate and personally painful. No one should be allowed to ignore or forget the kind of abuse she suffered at the hands of her countrymen in Germany.

The second victim, though, tells a story that to me was somewhat more troubling. The story of Alfons Heck,

while not as tortured as Helen's, is really just as troubling. Here was a child brainwashed by the Nazis whose innate morality was perverted to the point that he admits that he would have committed any act demanded of him by the Nazis, without consideration or even knowledge of its depravity. A lifetime of soul searching has left him angry at what was done to him. He does not feel that he deserves forgiveness, and does not ask for any; he only tells his story in the hope that some who hear it will understand, and take it upon themselves to do what they can to make sure that no one else is victimized as he was.

The story of the relationship these two formed with each other in America is inspiring. It is easy to despair for humanity when reading stories like this, but these two offer hope. In the aftermath of atrocities emanating from the worst aspects of the human psyche, Alfons and Helen show a way through by their friendship with each other.

Still, though, the incident in the book that will stick with me is the one in which a seventeen year old American student asks Alfons (with Helen sitting next to him) if he would have shot Helen during the war had he been ordered to do so. His truthful answer to that blunt question, his pained apology to Helen after giving it, and her response in turn to him, illustrate the extent of the journey traveled by these individual participants in the worst event of the troubled twentieth century.

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