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Dawn It Cannot Be

There could not have been a stronger advocate for public Libraries than Murrysville's own Lois Albrecht, recipient of the Pa Library Association Distinguished Service Award and other recognitions. It is she that I did not name last week who taught me that democracy itself depends on public Libraries to inform, both by their resources and their services. This article is about informed World War II books of historical record (two mentioned previously in this series), as worthy reading for how a functioning democracy was once obliterated.

Imagine yourself at the dawn of World War II, though dawn that war cannot be. The violence of brownshirts and book-burning does not signal sunshine. Rather, death not life. Hate not love. What began its cycle?

There are two books that frame the issues best for me, but first, for just the blood and guts of it, there are these that I want to suggest for you: (1) Shirer, William L., "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany" (1960); (2) Salisbury, Harrison E., "The 900 Days of Leningrad: The Siege of Leningrad" (1969); (3) Kuznetsov, A. Anatoli, "Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel," uncensored version (1970); and (4) Frank, Anne, "The Diary of a Young Girl" (1953).

For those of you fascinated by communications technology of the Internet, who want to know more of that earlier time of radio wave primacy (that helped feed the Nazi propaganda machine), there is also the historical war novel of Doerr, Anthony, "All the Light We Cannot See" (2014). It won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2015.

Now the promised first two. Albert Speer wrote his translated memoir "Inside the Third Reich" (1970) while in Spandau Prison serving a 20-year Nuremberg Trials sentence. It is notable for his way-too-late reflections on a life ill spent as Hitler's ambitious architect first and then his technologically proficient Minister of Armaments and Munitions. Speer's book's look back at Nazi Germany through guilty eyes gave me my first deep understanding of 19th century politician Lord Acton's famous "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." I now judge all ambitious politicians by the measure of Speer.

The second book that frames the issues best for me is Volker Ullrich's translated "Hitler: Ascent 1889-1939" (2016). It is the first of two volumes. So striking in it are "The Disordered Mind" (Ian Hughes 2018) of Hitler himself, his tenacity, his power to corrupt in a time of very high unemployment, the depth of Hitler's hatred for "the others" crowned by tribal nationalism, and how German leaders imploded and drowned in a sea of complacency, faulty assumptions about their own powers to control, and failure to be vigilant about the democracy with which they were entrusted. Theirs was a democracy blown to pieces in an "augenblick."

As always, if I have stimulated your interest in this very serious subject and these books, and that was very much my intent, then all you need for access to them is your WLN card and the friendly help at your public Library. These books should be on all our

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night tables, dire and frightening though their stories are. They chart one exceptionally bad cycle among others. It is important to know, and that is what Lois knew.

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