



2008

After the Train

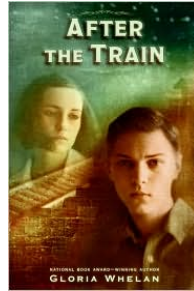
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Whelan, Gloria. *After the Train*. Harper Collins, 2009. ISBN 9780060295967. \$15.99. 152 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Jews--Germany--Juvenile fiction; German history--1945-1955--Juvenile fiction;

Antisemitism--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Thirteen-year-old Peter Liebig lives in West Germany and loves soccer and fishing. Anxious for summer vacation, he is tired of hearing about the horrors of the Nazi regime, which happened ten years ago, from Herr Schmidt, his history teacher. In the mean time, Peter is discovering more about his parents. His father is an architect helping to rebuild Rolfen's Saint Mary's Church, and his mother is a school teacher. Peter thinks, "Parents are mysteries you keep unraveling like the old sweater Mother took apart. ... I wonder what his secret is (p. 18-19)." Peter cannot help but think that his recurring nightmare of a tearful young woman is linked to the secret. In an attempt to unravel the mystery, Peter searches in his mother's drawer and finds letters his parents wrote during the war when his father was a soldier and his mother was a Red Cross nurse. After reading the letters and discovering a picture of the woman in his dream, Peter guesses he is Jewish, and that his parents are not his biological parents. Peter's friendship with one of his father's workmen, Jewish Herr Schafer, helps Peter think through and further define his identify.

Whelan's historical novel, with separate adventures told in first person, connects the reader to the uncertain times following Nazi power and introduces prominent historical figures. The story begins with an exciting encounter. Sometimes the events lacked connectedness, however. The ending is abrupt and many issues are not resolved. Will Jews be able to stay in Rolfen? Will Peter disclose his real identify? How will this affect his relationship with his friends, his participation in soccer, gaining an education, etc? The addition of an author's note, summarizing what the German Jews experienced from the mid 1950s to the present, could have enhanced this story.

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