

As U.S. Marks 80th Anniversaries, Family's Story of Good and Evil is Retold

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Son of German-Jewish Family Uncovers Diaries from pre-War Nazi Germany

Eighty years ago, those who were part of America's "Greatest Generation" were beginning to define events that would prove to be some of the country's finest moments. In stark contrast, Germany was entering its darkest period.

The two countries powered ahead on a collision course that would lead to vastly different fortunes for its people, notes Torkel S Wächter, the son of German-Jewish parents who uncovered fascinating family documents written during the ascendancy of Nazism in Europe.

On his website, www.onthisday80yearsago.com, he replays history in diary fashion with posts appearing on the anniversary of events 80 years ago in Germany. It's an artistic/literary project called "simulated real time," a way of commemorating history so that it's not forgotten, he says.

"These anniversaries make for an excellent study in contrast in history for the two countries," Wächter says; he cites the following examples:

• **United States:** Eighty years ago, the country was beginning a relationship with one of the most beloved presidents in U.S. history, Franklin D. Roosevelt. On May 7, the 32nd commander-in-chief outlined his economic plan, the New Deal, in one of his famous fireside

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chats.

• **Germany:** In stark contrast, just three days later in Germany, literature deemed “un-German” was destroyed in the infamous Nazi book burning. Earlier in 1933, Adolf Hitler had attained power, and on April 1, Jewish businesses were boycotted.

• **Post-war legacy:** While WWII was the beginning of the end for the Nazi party, the war marked the end of America's Great Depression. For the past 80 years, the United States has remained the preeminent world superpower. In contrast, the reconstruction of Germany after the war was a long process; 7.5 million – 11 percent – of Germans had been killed; the country's cities were largely destroyed; and agricultural production had declined by two-thirds. A psychological shame has hovered over Germans since the discovery of genocidal death camps.

“I used to hate Germany; while growing up, my father never discussed his German upbringing, even though he was obsessed with the country,” says Wächter, who was raised in Sweden. “We were never allowed to talk about it because the pain from the past was still alive in him.”

After his father died, Wächter finally opened the boxes he'd left behind. They were filled with diaries, letters, articles and other documents. From these, he wrote “The Investigation,” which highlights questions about personal responsibility and evil during pre-war Nazi Germany.

These are lessons, he says, from which we can all learn today.

“It's much more difficult to hate something that you come to understand,” he says. “I no longer hate Germany. I've realized that my father actually *loved* the country – he had a great upbringing there, and Jews in Germany had been a success story. But because of what occurred under Hitler, he felt such betrayal and pain, he could never bring himself to talk about it.”

About Torkel S Wächter

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Torkel S Wächter is the descendant of German-Jewish civil servants who suffered under the Nazi regime. His book, "The Investigation," outlines the experience as recorded by his paternal grandfather and father. He studied economic history, development theory and languages at the universities of Lund, Melbourne and Barcelona, as well as Jewish studies at Paideia, the European Institute for Jewish Studies, and architectural restoration at the Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm. After a stint as a fashion model in Paris and Barcelona, Wächter trained as a diver in the Royal Swedish Navy and then went on to an aviation career. During the 1990s Wächter served as a first officer with Scandinavian Airlines. In 1997 Wächter published his first novel, "Samson," and in 1999 he published the first Swedish e-book. Wächter lives in Stockholm and Barcelona with his architect wife; together they have four children.