



The Ladders of Death

Philippe Erhard

Philippe Erhard

eBook (286pp)

978-0-9938318-0-5

The plotting of this book set during WWII is used perfectly to depict the human tendency to ignore atrocities.

The Ladders of Death is a beautifully written and compelling historical novel that's as much a call to action against apathy as it is a portrait of people trying to make sense of and determine how they'll react to the atrocities of World War II.

Opening in author Philippe Erhard's home city of Winnipeg, Canada, the novel shows from its very first pages Erhard's inability—but desire—to understand why so few people speak out and do something to stop heinous acts they know are wrong. Set in a 1941 clothing factory against the whirl and chug of always-running sewing machines, chapter 1 begins with twentysomething employee Jenny, who, at least at first, stands frozen as an older, Jewish coworker is verbally assaulted by her bosses:

It's a painful contrast to watch the pleasure on the foreman's face, his constant movements, his incessant talking, and the motionless shame of the woman. The room and factory are still. We are silent. ... I'm hoping that somebody will intervene to stop these verbal and physical attacks, but nobody does. ... From where I sit at the back of the room, the drama feels remote and the silence difficult to break. I am torn. Should I speak out or not? Should I intervene or not?

The real action of the scene is what doesn't occur. It's the question that lurks about why, out of all of the dozens of people standing on the factory floor, Jenny is the only one to take a stand to defend this woman.

A physician, Erhard says his idea for the novel came out of his wondering why some people act in the face of wrongdoing while others stand by. He uses Jenny, medical student Paul, and those who surround them to explore this complex and mystifying side of human nature. Showing both the desperation and determination of so many who lived through World War II, he takes readers with Jenny and Paul on an archetypal hero's journey that brings the couple though Canada, into France, under the Jura Mountains, and finally to the top of the cliff-side "Ladder of Death" that can lead them into the safety and security of Switzerland.

Told through the alternating viewpoints of Jenny and Paul, *The Ladders of Death* is smartly written, well plotted, and wholly believable. Rich descriptions create vivid pictures of the sometimes harsh but almost always beautiful landscapes. The result is a realistic and vivid novel that engages from beginning to end.

Although this is Erhard's first novel, it is not his first book. He wrote the nonfiction *Being: A Hiking Guide Through Life*, published in 2010, as "an inspirational book designed to help people overwhelmed by the business and speed of life." A similar desire to inspire can be seen in *The Ladders of Death* through both the storyline and Erhard's use of quotes about choices, bravery, and fear. Sprinkled between sections are inspirational words from St. Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and other influential leaders who chose courage over comfort and, very often, pain over passivity. They enhance the overall work.

The Ladders of Death is a debut novel that will appeal to not just those who enjoy adventure and history, but also to those who believe that everyday people have the power to change the world.

CINDY WOLFE BOYTON (July 25, 2014)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.