

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## It could be worse

We're all cooped up in our dwellings. The stress is showing. Pottstown has seen two domestic homicides in the last two weeks and a fatal shootout with police.

To match the shocking suddenness and privations of the pandemic, you'd have to go back to World War II.



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton

Today we can still get out into the fresh air (keeping our distance) and buy food and other essentials.

The same was not true for the Jews after Hitler came to power in Germany.

One of the most powerful teaching tools about hate and oppression is "The Diary of Anne Frank." While visiting Pottstown Middle School some years ago, I recall an English teacher telling me the profound impact the diary had on her eighth graders.

(It's a major theme in the movie "Freedom Writers," now streaming on Netflix.)

When the Nazis invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, they first identified and isolated the Jews.

By 1942 they began deporting them to concentration camps.

Eventually, three-quarters of the 140,000 Jews living in the Netherlands were murdered. About 30,000 went into hiding. By 1944, the attics, cellars and secret rooms of Amsterdam hid tens of thousands of Jews.

Anne Frank was 13 years old when she went into hiding in 1942 with her parents, sister, and three others. They lived on two floors of her father's warehouse in the center of Amsterdam. Anne wrote about her life in a diary, which survived the war.

Five gentile warehouse employees of her father's helped keep them hidden and brought them food.

All Jews in hiding were completely dependent on others, often people they didn't know very well. Anyone found harboring Jews was likely to be sent to a labor camp or even shot.

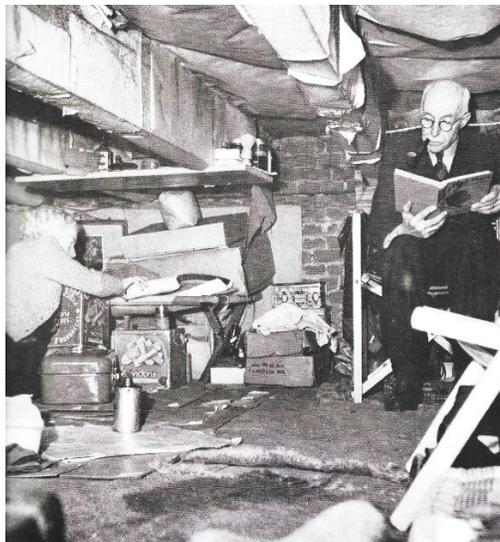
Rationing made it difficult

for anyone to get food, much less get extra food for Jews in hiding. Moreover, Nazis offered cash payments to those willing to turn in Jews.

In Amsterdam and other cities, the hiding places were usually small, and those in hiding had to keep absolutely quiet. Any unusual noise could betray their presence to neighbors. There was the constant fear of betrayal, as Anne Frank and her family were betrayed (by people unknown in August 1944). Anne and the others were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Only her father survived the war. Two gentile helpers were also arrested and sent to work camps (but survived the war). Anne's diary was first published by her father in 1947.

Here in Pottstown, 2020, it may be stressful to shelter in place, either alone or with people who may get on our nerves, but it's nothing compared to the suffering others have experienced, like Anne Frank.

Her diary is now one of the world's most famous books. Anne Frank's father corresponded with people all over the world until his death in 1980. "Despite all the differences" he wrote, "there is usually a desire to learn from the past and to work towards a better understanding among people."



**AN ELDERLY JEWISH COUPLE** pass away the hours in an attic hideout of a gentile homeowner in Amsterdam in 1943. Only the courage of their host stood between them and the Gestapo.