

On Hitler's Mountain - My Nazi Childhood by Irmgard Hunt.
Atlantic Books London 2005.

It is almost commonplace these days to receive memoirs written by survivors of the Holocaust; as the years since the Second World War have passed and the survivors have begun more and more to contemplate their mortality, so the pressure understandably grows to put on record the extraordinary experiences of their childhood or youth for their families and for posterity.

To this genre in very recent years must now be added the memoirs of those who, in a very different way, may also be seen as the victims of Nazism - the Germans who were sucked into the heady maelstrom of Nazi ideology and then plunged into a war which destroyed their nation, its reputation, and, most intimately, members of their families.

On Hitler's Mountain is one such memoir, written by a woman who was born in the mid-1930s in the village of Berchtesgaden, close by the famous mountain retreat of the Führer, on whose knee she once posed for a photo - much to her parent's joy. Irmgard's early life, in spite of the seismic changes that were going on around her, seems to have been happy, and she assimilated much of the ideology and iconography of Nazism; until the news that her father had been killed, when the scales seem to have begun to drop from her eyes, a process completed after the war ended and the full extent of the Nazis' crimes became widely known.

In the late 1950s Irmgard Hunt emigrated to the United States; where she still lives, and sat down to write her memoir at the prompting of her son. Her final chapter is especially moving, particularly when she revisits the place of her birth and childhood. This is a valuable book, the writing of which must have been both painful and therapeutic, and a welcome addition to the huge bibliography of the darkest period in 20th century European history.

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