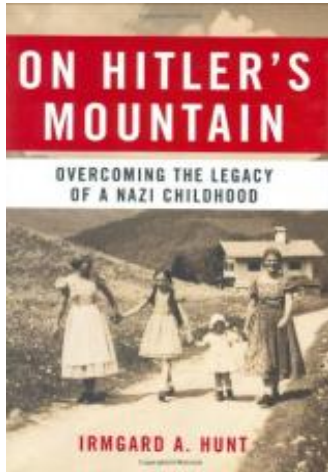


On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood

by Irmgard A. Hunt



About the Book

On Hitler's Mountain is a powerful, intimate, riveting, and revealing account of a seemingly halcyon life lived mere paces from a center of evil and madness; a remarkable memoir of an "ordinary" childhood spent in an extraordinary time and place.

Born in 1934, Irmgard Hunt grew up in the picturesque Bavarian village of Berchtesgaden, in the shadow of the Eagle's Nest and near Adolf Hitler's luxurious alpine retreat. The very model of blond Aryan "purity," Irmgard sat on the Führer's knee for photographers, witnessed with excitement the comings and goings of all manner of famous personages, and with the blindness of a child accepted the Nazi doctrine that most of her family and everyone around her so eagerly embraced. Here, in a picture-postcard world untouched by the war and seemingly unblemished by the horrors Germany's master had wrought, she accepted the lies of her teachers and church and civic leaders, joined the Hitler Youth at age ten, and joyfully sang the songs extolling the virtues of National Socialism.

But before the end -- when she and other children would be forced to cower in terror in dank bomb shelters and wartime deprivations would take a harrowing toll -- Irmgard's doubts about the "truths" she had been force-fed increased, fueled by the few brave souls who had not accepted Hitler and his abominations. After the fall of the brutal dictatorship and the suicide of its mad architect, many of her neighbors and loved ones still clung to their beliefs, prejudices, denial, and unacknowledged guilt. Irmgard, often feeling lonely in her quest, was determined to face the truth of her country's criminal past and to bear the responsibility for an almost unbearable reality that most of her elders were determined to forget. She resolved even then that the lessons of her youth would guide her actions and steel her commitment to defend the freedoms and democratic values that had been so easily dismissed by the German people.

Provocative and astonishing, Irmgard A. Hunt's **On Hitler's Mountain** offers a unique, gripping, and vitally important first-person perspective on a tumultuous era in modern history, as viewed through the eyes of a child -- a candid and

fascinating document, free of rationalization and whitewash, that chronicles the devastating moral collapse of a civilized nation.

Discussion Guide

1. Can you pinpoint the moment in your own life when you discovered the meaning of loss? What was that moment for Irmgard? Think of the children in your own life: do you believe that a child can ever truly understand death's logic?
2. How do you think Irmgard's experience of the loss of her father changed when, many years after his death, she realized that not only was he stolen from her by war, but also by flawed ideology?
3. As a reader, did you find yourself sympathizing with Irmgard, or were you hesitant to feel sorry for a victim of the Nazis who did not suffer the Konzentrationslager? Before reading **On Hitler's Mountain** had you thought of the psychological burden borne by German children of the Third Reich? How do you think their suffering differed from the guilt of their parents' generation?
4. Think back to your childhood. What were the major world events that influenced your own world view? Did you have a teacher or an adult in your life who shaped your opinion of the people of another nation, ethnicity, or racial group? Was there a moment when you realized that your own thoughts and ideas might have been manipulated by another's prejudices or by the political culture of the times?
5. How do you think Irmgard's brutal and early experience with the unfathomable forces of chance, time, history and circumstance set a course for her life? Do you believe that she would have grown to be a different person if she had been born ten years earlier or ten years later?
6. It has been said that "a man's character is his fate." Do you believe that character is immutable, or can it be influenced by the times in which we live? How is the destiny of the led bound to the leader?
7. Discuss whether you feel that ordinary citizens, both men and women, are an integral part of the political decisions and events of which they can become either beneficiaries or victims. What, if anything, could an average German who disagreed with the Nazis or became disenchanted with them have done about Hitler once he was in power? How much influence do you think your own personal politics has on the public and foreign policy decisions of your own national government?
8. This leads to a question many people have asked. Could a Hitler happen here? If you think so what would be the circumstances? Are there aspects of life in the United States that would prevent a Hitler from occurring here?

Author Bio

Irmgard A. Hunt has been an executive at a number of environmental organizations, including the Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe, a project of the German Marshall Fund. After years as a

consultant to several international not-for-profit organizations, she retired and began to write her memoirs. She holds a B.A. from Columbia University (which she earned at age fifty-two) and an M.P.A. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She lives in Washington, D.C., and has two children and two grandchildren.

On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood

by Irmgard A. Hunt

Publication Date: March 1, 2005

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: William Morrow

ISBN-10: 0060532173

ISBN-13: 9780060532178