



The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood

By Ursula Mahlendorf

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While we now have a great number of testimonials to the horrors of the Holocaust from survivors of that dark episode of twentieth-century history, rare are the accounts of what growing up in Nazi Germany was like for people who were reared to think of Adolf Hitler as the savior of his country, and rarer still are accounts written from a female perspective. Ursula Mahlendorf, born at the height of the Great Depression in 1929 to a middle-class family, was for a long while during her childhood a true believer in Nazism, the daughter of a man who was a member of the SS at the time of his early death in 1935--and a leader in the Hitler Youth herself. This is her vivid and unflinchingly honest account of her indoctrination into Nazism and of her gradual awakening to all the damage that Nazism had done to her country. It reveals why Nazism initially appealed to people from her station in life and how Nazi ideology was inculcated into young people. The book recounts the increasing hardships of life under Nazism as the war progressed and the chaos and turmoil that followed Germany's defeat. In the first part of this absorbing narrative, we see the young Ursula as she becomes an enthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth and then goes on to a Nazi teacher training school at age 15. In the second part, which traces her growing disillusionment with and anger at the Nazi leadership, we follow her story as she flees from the Russian army's advance in the spring of 1945, works for a time in a hospital caring for the wounded, returns to Silesia when it is under Polish administration, and finally is evacuated to the West, where she begins a new life and pursues her dream of becoming a teacher. In a moving Epilogue, Mahlendorf discloses how she learned to accept and cope emotionally with the shame that haunted her from her childhood allegiance to Nazism and the self-doubts it generated.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A former German and women's studies professor at UC–Santa Barbara, Mahlendorf grew up in a small town in Silesia and was a squad leader in the Hitler Youth who embraced Hitler as a father substitute after the death of her own father, a former SS member, in 1935 and also in rebellion against her mother who disapproved of the Nazis. Her escape from a group suicide pact in the wake of Hitler's suicide was a first step in her denazification and eventual acceptance of her culpability in the Holocaust, an open-ended process that gained a feminist twist as she realized how politics were personal under Nazism. An eye-opening, honest and absorbing account of how evil takes root and flourishes among ordinary people. *Illus. (Mar. 28)*

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From [Booklist](#)

Inducted into the Hitler Youth at age 10, Ursula Mahlendorf witnesses the pogrom of Krystallnacht in her small German town and becomes an ardent follower, exhilarated by news of German victories. Now a retired professor of German literature and women's studies at the University of California, she is still torn with guilt, "mortified that I felt edified by such trash." As a young teen, she was a bystander; if she had been old enough, would she have been a perpetrator? It is that dual perspective that gives this memoir its power: the immediacy of her memories; the shame, remorse, and uncertainty of remembering. There is sometimes too much personal detail, especially about her academic career that led to a Fulbright scholarship to the U.S. But the personal experience is haunting about then and now: how you can develop a shell of toughness and numbness and not know what is happening at Bergen-Belsen, only 50 miles away from where you live. -- Hazel Rochman

Review

The Shame of Survival is a compelling memoir of a girl's experiences growing up in Nazi Germany that analyzes the life-long implications of Nazi indoctrination on a sensitive, thoughtful young woman. It shows how a reluctant, shy, frightened, and naive BDM member becomes swept up in Nazi ideology and documents the life-long psychic ramifications of living with that legacy: feelings of guilt and shame, a need to work through these experiences and to take responsibility for and mourn the past. Focusing on both class and gender, Mahlendorf's memoir offers a unique and valuable perspective on a growing body of emergent belated narratives on Nazi Germany by German emigre academics. --Anna Kuhn

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An eye-opening, honest and absorbing account of how evil takes root and flourishes among ordinary people. --Publishers Weekly

Users Review

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Jack Lacasse:

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