HITLER YOUTH

GROWING UP IN HITLER'S SHADOW

SUSAN CAMPBELL BARTOLETTI

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Title page photo: Throughout Germany, Hitler Youth spread information about the Nazi Party in an effort to attract new members. The banner says, LEADERS INSTRUCT. WE FOLLOW! ALL SAY YES! BILDARCHIV PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ, BERLIN.

For my mother, with love

CONTENTS

THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS BOOK

Alfons Heck

Alfons Heck was born in 1928 in Wittlich, a small Rhineland village in western Germany. At age ten, Alfons attended the Nazis' Nuremberg rally, where he listened, spellbound, as Adolf Hitler spoke. In 1944, at the young age of sixteen, Alfons commanded more than eight hundred Hitler Youth. As the Allied forces closed in, he led Hitler Youth and others in the defense of Germany.

Helmuth Hübener

Helmuth Hübener was born in 1925 in Hamburg, Germany. Sixteen-year-old Helmuth and his two best friends, Karl Schnibbe and Rudi Wobbe, broke the German "Radio Law," which forbade Germans from listening to foreign radio stations. When Helmuth realized that the Nazis were lying to the German people, he printed anti-Nazi leaflets that passed on the foreign news to others—a crime punishable by death under Nazi law.

Dagobert (Bert) Lewyn

In 1923, Dagobert (Bert) Lewyn was born in Berlin, Germany. As a Jew, he suffered humiliation and persecution at the hands of the Nazis and the Hitler Youth. Bert was eighteen when his parents were deported to a death camp in 1942, leaving him to work as a forced laborer for the Nazis in a Berlin munitions factory.

Melita Maschmann

In 1918, Melita Maschmann was born in Berlin, Germany. When Hitler came to power, her parents forbade her to join the Bund Deutscher Mädel, or BDM, the girls' branch of the Hitler Youth. Convinced that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party would better Germany, fifteen-year-old Melita disobeyed her parents and sneaked out to weekly BDM meetings.

Henry Metelmann

Born in 1922, Henry Metelmann lived in the small town of Altona, near Hamburg in northwest Germany. Despite his father's disapproval, he joined the Hitler Youth. When war broke out in 1939, sixteen-year-old Henry was eager to fight. He became a tank driver and saw action in France, Russia, Poland, and Austria.

Herbert Norkus

Herbert Norkus was born in 1916 and lived with his father and younger brother in Moabit, an impoverished Berlin neighborhood. His mother forbade him to join the Hitler Youth, but after her death in 1931, fourteen-year-old Herbert joined. He campaigned to get Nazis elected to office.

Karl-Heinz Schnibbe

Karl-Heinz Schnibbe was born in 1924 in Hamburg, Germany. He thought the Hitler Youth sounded like a great deal of fun, so he joined eagerly when the Nazis enlisted eligible boys in his neighborhood. However, he soon tired of the rules and discipline. With his two best friends, Helmuth Hübener and Rudi Wobbe, Karl protested the Nazi regime.

Elisabeth Vetter

Elisabeth Vetter was born in 1931 and attended a Catholic school in Rötz, a village in southeastern Germany, near the Czechoslovakian border. When Elisabeth was eight, her mother and father scolded her for her loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Elisabeth told her Hitler Youth leaders on her parents—an action that led to their arrest.

Rudolf (Rudi) Wobbe

Rudolf (Rudi) Wobbe was born in 1926 in Hamburg, Germany. Along with Karl Schnibbe and Helmuth Hübener, fifteen-year-old Rudi listened to foreign radio broadcasts and distributed anti-Nazi leaflets.

Inge, Hans, and Sophie Scholl

The Scholl children lived with their parents in Ulm, a small town near Stuttgart in southern Germany. The oldest, Inge Scholl, was born in 1917 and was sixteen when Adolf Hitler came to power. Inge and her two brothers and two sisters joined the Hitler Youth eagerly, despite their father's misgivings. Inge's younger brother Hans Scholl, born in 1918, commanded a unit of 150 boys, but soon rebelled against the conformity and loss of individual rights. Hans's younger sister Sophie Scholl shared his feelings. Born in 1921, Sophie loved Germany but also detested the lost freedoms under the Nazi regime. While students at the University of Munich, Hans and Sophie joined with others in a dangerous campaign against Hitler, the Nazis, and the war.

* * *

In this 1934 photograph taken on German Youth Day in Potsdam, a young boy wearing an SA (Storm Trooper) uniform raises his hand in the Nazi salute. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

During a 1935 parade in Potsdam, these uniformed children clamber for the chance to see Adolf Hitler. At top, the boys salute the passing Nazi flag.
BILDARCHIV PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ, BERLIN.

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"FOR THE FLAG WE ARE READY TO DIE"

Hitler's Rise to Power

MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 1933. After an early supper, fifteen-year-old Melita Maschmann dressed in her winter coat and accompanied her parents to downtown Berlin.

The dark streets were already flooded with thousands of excited people, who, like Melita, were turning out to watch the victory parade in honor of Adolf Hitler. Earlier that day, Germany's aging president, Paul von Hindenburg, had appointed Hitler chancellor, making him the second-most powerful man in the country. For Hitler and the National Socialist Party,

In this later photograph, Adolf Hitler greets the cheering crowds. He wears a black tuxedo just as he did on January 30, 1933, the night of his celebration parade. HEINRICH HOFFMAN.

this was the triumph they had long awaited. Melita did not want to miss one minute of the celebration.

By seven o'clock, Melita and her parents stood on the crowded Wilhelmstrasse, the wide street that led past the President's Palace and the Chancellery, the building that housed important government offices.

Melita's mother and father did not belong to the National Socialist Party, but they had agreed to allow her to watch the parade. Melita couldn't understand

why her parents didn't support a great man like Adolf Hitler, who said that a person's money and titles didn't matter. All that mattered was whether a person contributed to the well-being of the people.

The night air felt brisk as the wintry wind swept down the street. From balconies and windows above the streets, colorful flags snapped crisply. Most flags were red and white with thick black swastikas or white with black swastikas, the symbol of the Nazi Party. On some

In this 1935 photograph, police officers hold back excited spectators as they cheer Hitler. Young people were especially drawn to Hitler and his promises. HEINRICH HOFFMAN.

hastily homemade banners, the swastikas had been sewn on backward. But it didn't matter: Their good intentions fluttered like dark birds above the city streets.

Elsewhere, in Berlin's parks and gardens, thousands of Hitler followers stood in military formation. For the most part, the followers were young, out-of-work men, who proudly wore the brown shirts of Hitler's private army. They were called the SA, short for Sturmabteilung (Storm Troopers). Other followers included Hitler's personal bodyguard formation, the black-shirted SS, short for Schutzstaffel (Guard Squadron), and the uniformed boys and girls who belonged to the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth).

At last, bugles blared, drums rolled, and the parade began. Hitler's followers sang Nazi songs as they marched straight-legged, goose-stepping in military style. In perfect rhythm, their jackboots rang out against the cobblestones. Each marcher carried a flaming torch, creating a river of light that flowed through the center of Berlin.

This undated photograph shows torch-bearing Nazis parading through the Brandenburg Gate. They stream down Unter den Linden, the wide tree-lined avenue in downtown Berlin, just as they did on January 30, 1933. NATIONAL ARCHIVES.

The spectators screamed and waved red-and-white swastika flags. Police deputies kept order, pushing back the crowds as they spilled off the sidewalks.

The marchers streamed through the massive stone Brandenburg Gate and turned down Wilhelmstrasse.

They flowed past the President's Palace, where President Hindenburg stood in his brightly lit window. Looking dignified in his military uniform, he pounded his cane in time to the music.

The marchers shouted their respects to the president, but a few windows farther, at the Chancellery, they spotted Hitler standing on the balcony. They extended their arms in the Nazi salute and thundered joyously, "*Heil* Hitler!"

Parents held up small children to see the new chancellor. In the plaza across from the chancellery building, boys swarmed the treetops for a better view. From time to time, Hitler leaned over the balcony and raised his right arm in salute. At each salute, the spectators cheered even more wildly.

Radio stations broadcast the historic parade in nearly every German city. Although some people stayed home to listen to the broadcasts, many celebrated, taking part in midnight torchlight parades that snaked throughout other German towns and cities.

The Nazis called the celebrations the "awakening of Germany."

Melita Maschmann watched the Berlin parade until long past midnight. She marveled that many uniformed marchers were boys and girls near her own age. She became carried away by their spirit of self-sacrifice as they sang, "For the flag we are ready to die. . . ."

Feeling a surge of patriotism, Melita burned with desire to join these young people. "I longed to hurl myself into this current," she said. "I wanted to belong to these people for whom it was a matter of life and death."

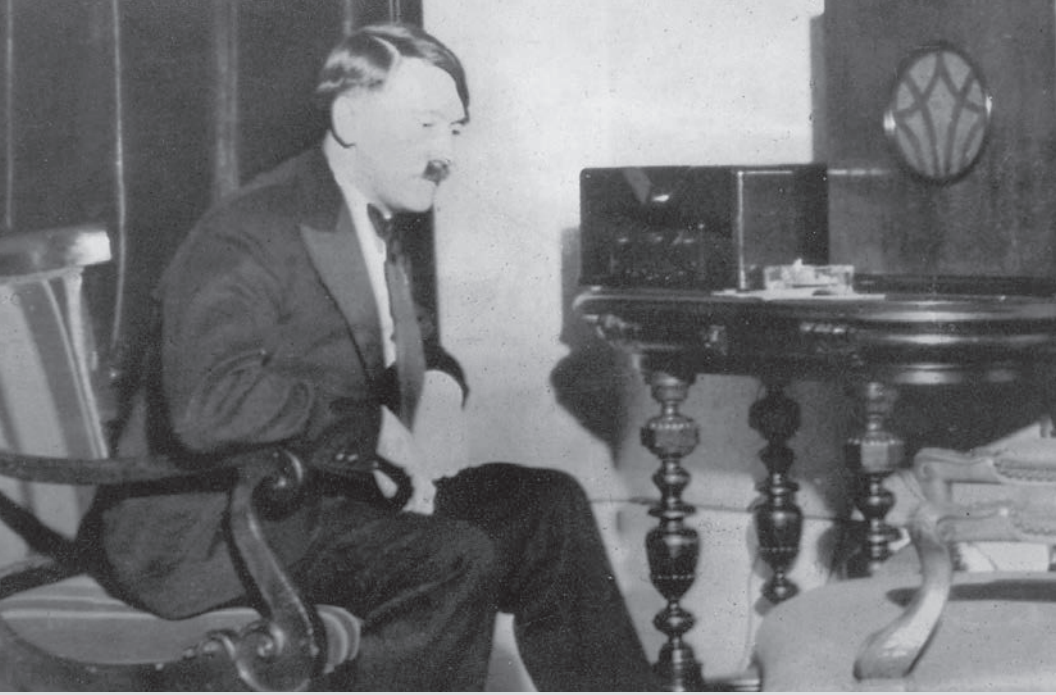
Later that night, after the torchlight parade had ended and the Maschmanns had returned home, Melita announced to her parents that she wanted to join the girls' branch of the Hitler Youth, called the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM), or League of German Girls. Her parents said no, absolutely not. Furious, Melita called her parents "out of date" and "terribly old-fashioned."

Two nights later, on February 1, Hitler addressed the German people for the first time over the radio. Hitler understood that a leader must reach the people personally. He also understood that the radio was a powerful political tool because it brought his voice into the homes of ordinary people, making them feel close and connected to him.

Not every German family could afford a radio, but those who could gathered around, eager to hear what the new chancellor would say. Hitler was an exciting speaker. His voice captivated his listeners. He seemed to know just the right note, the right word or phrase to rouse the emotions of his audience.

"I can remember the feeling I had when he spoke," said Sasha Schwarz, who was eleven when Hitler came to power. "'At last,' I said, 'here's somebody who can get us out of this mess.'"

Most Germans agreed that their country, or Fatherland, was a mess. The German people suffered from widespread poverty and unemployment. In 1929, the



Adolf Hitler understood the power of the radio. Here, he listens intently to the results of the German parliamentary elections in March 1933. UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM.

same Great Depression that affected the United States also struck Germany and other European countries. By 1933, poverty and unemployment reached an all-time high in Germany.

Furthermore, the Germans suffered from humiliation after losing World War I. In 1919, when the Allied countries, namely Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, met to negotiate a peace treaty, the Allied leaders imposed harsh conditions on Germany. The Treaty

of Versailles forced the German people to accept full responsibility for starting the war. As punishment, Germany had to relinquish its territories. The German people also had to pay an enormous sum of money, called reparations, for war damages. At the time, the reparations totaled about $32 billion.

The Treaty also installed a democratic government, called the Weimar Republic. Unaccustomed to democracy, many Germans had little faith in their president and elected Reichstag. They longed for a strong leader who promised them jobs and a better life, even if he had extreme ideas. Tired of poor living and working conditions, they wanted a simple but drastic solution. And so, on February 1, 1933, as Hitler's voice boomed over the radio, the German people felt grateful for his leadership. "This time, the front lines are at home," Hitler told them. "Unity is our tool. We are not fighting for ourselves but for Germany."

Not everyone believed Hitler and his promises. Henry Metelmann remembered how his mother came

home crying when she heard the news about Hitler's appointment. "How can Hindenburg do this to us?" she said. "Install gangsters in government without giving us a chance to vote on it?"

Some people were frightened, especially when Hitler promised to defy the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler intended to rebuild Germany's military. He intended to unite all Germans into a Greater Germany, including ethnic Germans who lived in Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other countries with large German populations. He also vowed to end the reparations payments.

Some Germans feared that Hitler would lead them to war. When Willi Weisskirch's father came home from work and read the newspaper headline, he exclaimed, "Oh my God! Now there will be a war. Hitler is the chancellor now, and that means war!"

German Jews were especially worried. It was no secret that Hitler considered them "parasites" and wanted to remove them from public life in Germany.

Nine-year-old Bert Lewyn watched his father's dismay as he read the news about Hitler's appointment. "This does not bode well for Germany," warned Bert's father. "There's no way to predict what will happen to us." At the time, no one could have predicted the fate of Jews like the Lewyn family.

But millions of other Germans were simply apathetic about the news of Hitler's appointment. They found it hard to feel excited about the changes he promised. In 1933, Germany had forty different political parties, each one making promises as it struggled for power.

Tired of broken promises, these Germans simply shrugged their shoulders and went on with their lives. They doubted that a new chancellor—even one as popular as Hitler—would improve their lives. They believed that Hitler's popularity would slump as soon as he broke his promises. It was just a matter of time. And so, they did nothing.

But not Melita Maschmann. As she listened to Hitler's radio speech, she felt hope for her future. "I believed the National Socialists when they promised to do away with unemployment and poverty," she said. "I believed them when they said they would reunite the German nation."

Against her parents' wishes, Melita joined the BDM secretly. She sneaked out to the weekly meetings held in a dark and grimy cellar.

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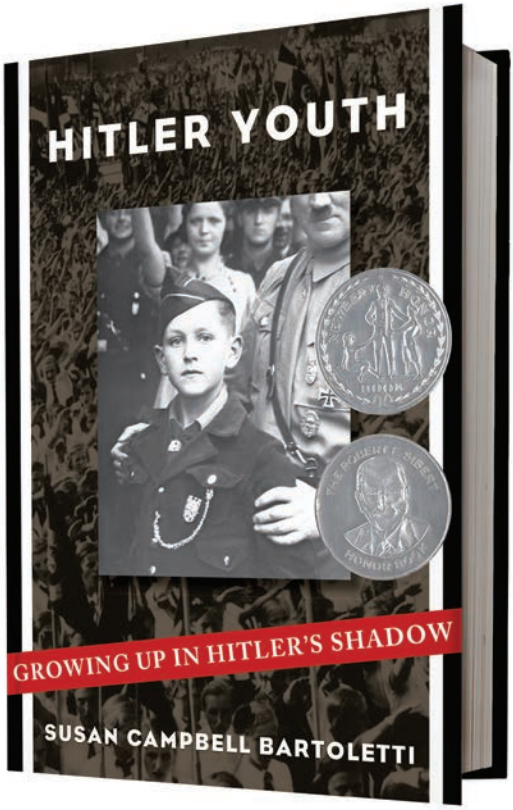

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