

A Hitler Youth in Poland: The Nazi Children's Evacuation Program During World War II (Jewish Lives)

Jost Hermand



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Between 1933 and 1945, millions of German children between the ages of seven and sixteen were taken from their homes and sent to Hitler Youth paramilitary camps to be toughened up and taught how to be "German." Separated from their families and sent to far-away away places like Denmark, Latvia, Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and occupied Poland, these children often endured incredible abuse by the adults in charge. In this memoir, Jost Hermand, a distinguished German cultural critic and historian who spent much of his youth in five different camps, writes about his experiences during this period. After reviewing what others have published about the camps and explaining why previous romanticized views must be corrected, Hermand provides background into the creation and development of the camps. He then devotes one chapter apiece to each of the five different camps to which he was sent: Kirchenpopowo, San Remo, Gross Ottingen, Silesia, and Sulmierschutz. Each was quite different from the other, he writes, and almost every form of behavior existed at each place. The children did sometimes find, with certain adults, parental solicitude, belief in the inherent goodness of human beings, and naive idealism, but by and large they encountered fascistic indoctrination, dreary routine, conscious brutalization, and the worst sort of sadism. In the two final chapters, Hermand focuses on the postwar consequences of his camp experiences for his own development, and his return visit in 1991 to some of the sites. In these chapters, as in the rest of the book, Hermand carefully and skillfully combines his personal story with an analysis of the overall purpose of the camps. An intelligent and persuasive document, this book should be read by anyone interested in psychology, the history of everyday life, and in the story of Germany under Hitler.



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