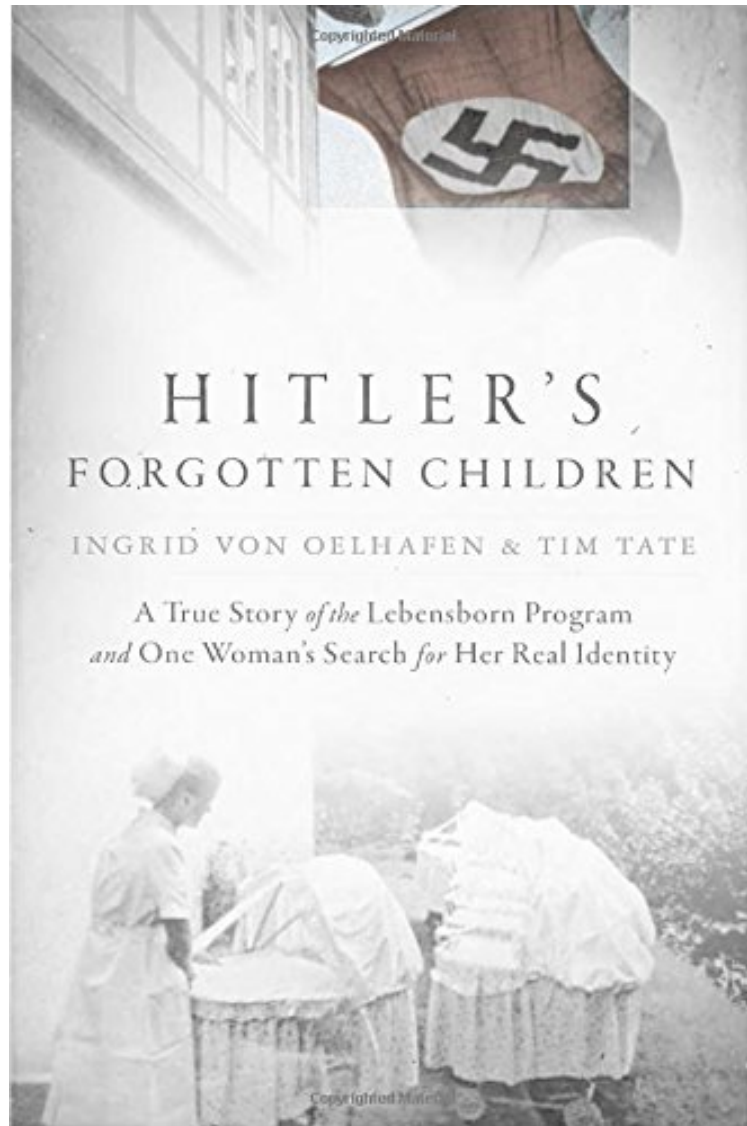


(Mobile ebook) Hitler's Forgotten Children: A True Story of the Lebensborn Program and One Woman's Search for Her Real Identity

## Hitler's Forgotten Children: A True Story of the Lebensborn Program and One Woman's Search for Her Real Identity

Ingrid von Oelhafen, Tim Tate

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**Ingrid von Oelhafen, Tim Tate : Hitler's Forgotten Children: A True Story of the Lebensborn Program and One Woman's Search for Her Real Identity** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hitler's Forgotten Children: A True Story of the Lebensborn Program and One Woman's Search for Her Real Identity:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. My heart goes out...By P. ClementsIt's not right to say I "loved" this book. It is just another piece of the international nightmare that was the Nazi era. I didn't know! But if I thought harder, I should have guessed that "breeding" was part of the plan. My heart goes out to all those now-grown children who find they were part of this experiment. You have great value to this world - to tell your stories of what it's like to grow up not knowing who you are, or to find out later that you are not who you thought. We applaud your courage.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Hitler's forgotten children: a TRUE story of the labensbornBy MozyI have been studying world war 'll for years and this is a interesting and cruel situation that was created and then carried on for far to long after the war.The telling of Erika Matkos story flowed well and was believable.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. powerful and horrifyingBy MickiRaeI learned a lot from this book. A must read. It will break your heart and then heal it anew.

Created by Heinrich Himmler, the Lebensborn program abducted as many as half a million children from across Europe. Through a process called Germanization, they were to become the next generation of the Aryan master race in the second phase of the Final Solution. In the summer of 1942, parents across Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia were required to submit their children to medical checks designed to assess racial purity. One such child, Erika Matko, was nine months old when Nazi doctors declared her fit to be a Child of Hitler. Taken to Germany and placed with politically vetted foster parents, Erika was renamed Ingrid von Oelhafen. Many years later, Ingrid began to uncover the truth of her identity. Though the Nazis destroyed many Lebensborn records, Ingrid unearthed rare documents, including Nuremberg trial testimony about her own abduction. Following the evidence back to her place of birth, Ingrid discovered an even more shocking secret: a woman named Erika Matko, who as an infant had been given to Ingrid's mother as a replacement child. Hitler's Forgotten Children is both a harrowing personal memoir and a devastating investigation into the awful crimes and monstrous scope of the Lebensborn program. INCLUDES PHOTOGRAPHS

What von Oelhafen brings to the story is a personal dimension. Kirkus sAbout the AuthorTim Tate is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and bestselling author of nonfiction books, including Slave Girl. His films have been honored by Amnesty International, the Royal Television Society, UNESCO, and the International Documentary Association. Ingrid von Oelhafen (Erika Matko) is a retired physical therapist living in Osnabruck, Germany. For more than twenty years she has been investigating her own extraordinary story and that of Lebensborn. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. TITLE PAGE COPY RIGHT DEDICATION PREFACE ONE: August 1942 TWO: 1945 Year Zero THREE: Escape FOUR: Home FIVE: Identity SIX: Walls SEVEN: Source of Life EIGHT: Bad Arolsen NINE: The Order TEN: Hope ELEVEN: Traces TWELVE: Nuremberg THIRTEEN: Rogaka Slatina FOURTEEN: Blood FIFTEEN: Pure SIXTEEN: Taken SEVENTEEN: Searching EIGHTEEN: Peace AFTERWORD ACKNOWLEDGMENTS BIBLIOGRAPHY PREFACE BLOOD. Blood runs through this story. The blood of young men spilled on the battlefields of war; the blood of civilians old and young, women and men that ran in the gutters of cities, towns, and villages across Europe; the blood of millions destroyed in the pogroms and death camps of the Holocaust. But blood, too, as an idea. The Nazi belief absurd and obscene as this seems today in good blood, precious ichor to be sought out, preserved, and expanded. And with it, the inevitable counterpart: bad blood, to be identified and then ruthlessly eradicated. I am a child of a war based on and steeped in blood. I was born in 1941 in the depths of the Second World War: I grew up in its wake and under the shadow of its brutal and even more prolonged progeny, the Cold War. My history is the history of millions of men and women like me. We are the victims of Hitler's obsession with blood, as well as the beneficiaries of the postwar economic miracle that transformed our devastated and pariah nation into the powerhouse of modern Europe. Our story is that of a generation raised in the shadow of bloody infamy, but one that found a way to struggle toward honesty and decency. But my own story is also that of a much more secret past: a history still cloaked in silence and shrouded in shame. It is a warning of what happens when blood is worshiped as the vital essence that determines human worth, and by extension used as the justification for the most terrible crimes man has inflicted upon man. For I am a child of Lebensborn. Lebensborn is an ancient German word, twisted and distorted by the word-smelters of National Socialism into a uniquely disturbing shape amid the vast and bizarre vocabulary of Hitler's Reich. What did it mean in the mad lexicon of Nazism? What does it mean today? To find the answer to uncover my own story has taken me on a long and painful journey: a physical journey, to be sure, which has led me across the map of modern Europe. An historical expedition, too: one that has required an often uncomfortable return to the Germany of more than seventy years ago, and into the troubled stories of those countries overrun by Hitler's armies. But the search for who I am, and who I have been, has also forced me to make a psychological voyage into everything I have known and grown up with: a fundamental questioning of who I am, and what it means to be German. I will not pretend that this is an easy story: it will not always be easy to read. But as if you do, please keep in mind that neither has it been an easy story to live. I am not, by nature, overtly emotional. The expression of emotions such a commonplace in twenty-first-century society does not come effortlessly to me. I have, I think, spent my life attempting to suppress my inner self, to subordinate my feelings to the circumstances

in which I have grown up, as well as to the needs of others. But this is a story that, I believe strongly, needs to be heard. More, much more, it needs to be understood. It is not unique, if by that we mean that there are others who have endured much of what has shaped my life and times. But, perhaps in defiance of the strict definition, there are, in life, gradations of uniqueness: and so, while I share a common thread with thousands of others who passed through the vile and perverse experiment of Lebensborn, to the best of my knowledge no one else shares the particular twists of fate, history, and geography that have defined my seventy-four years on earth. Lebensborn. The word runs through my life like the blood coursing through my body; a mysterious and powerful river, its route and progress obscure to the naked eye. To see it, to understand it, demands much more than a superficial examination: to find its source and thus the roots of this story requires a deep and intrusive investigation into the most hidden places. And we must start in a town and a country that no longer exist.

ONE August 1942 Men... must be shot, the women locked up and transported to concentration camps, and the children must be torn from their motherland and instead accommodated in the territories of the old Reich.

REICHSFHRER SS HEINRICH HIMMLER, June 25, 1942 CILLI, GERMAN-OCCUPIED YUGOSLAVIA: August 37, 1942 THE SCHOOL YARD was crowded. Hundreds of women young and old clutched the hands of their children and found what space they could in the packed courtyard; nearby, Wehrmacht soldiers, rifles slung over their shoulders, looked on as the families slowly drifted in from towns and villages across the area. These women had been summoned by order of their new German masters, ordered to bring their children to the school for medical tests. Upon arrival they were arrested and told to wait. Otto Lurker, commander of the police and security services for the region, watched, relaxed and impassive his hands resting comfortably in his pockets as the yard filled with families. Once, Lurker had been Hitler's jailer; now he was the Führer's leading henchman in Lower Styria. He held the rank of SS Standartenführer the paramilitary equivalent of a full colonel in the army but that summer's morning he was casually dressed in a two-piece civilian suit. Yugoslavia had been under Nazi rule for sixteen months. In March 1941, as the surrounding countries of Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria joined the Reich's alliance of Balkan nations, Hitler put pressure on the kingdom's ruler, the Regent Prince Paul, to fall into line. The prince and his cabinet bowed to the inevitable, formally tying Yugoslavia to the Axis Powers: but the Serb-dominated army launched a coup d'état, replacing Paul with his seventeen-year-old second cousin, Prince Peter. News of the revolt reached Berlin on March 27. Hitler took the coup as a personal insult and issued Directive 25, formally designating the country as an enemy of the Reich. The Führer ordered his armies to destroy Yugoslavia militarily and as a state. A week later, the Luftwaffe began a devastating bombing campaign while divisions of Wehrmacht infantry and tanks of the Panzer Corps swept through towns and villages. The Royal Yugoslavian Army was no match for Germany's Blitzkrieg troops: on April 17, the country surrendered. The occupying troops immediately set about fulfilling Hitler's instruction to dismantle all vestiges of the state. Sixty-five thousand people primarily intellectuals and nationalists were exiled, imprisoned, or murdered, their homes and property handed over to the new German masters. The Slovene language was prohibited. But for the rest of 1941 and throughout the first half of 1942, partisan groups, led by the Communist Josip Broz Tito, fought a determined campaign of resistance. Germany retaliated with a brutal crackdown: the Gestapo swooped on fighters and civilians alike, deporting thousands to concentration camps across the Reich. Others were selected to be executed as a warning against resistance. In a nine-month period beginning in September 1941, 374 men and women were lined up against the walls of the prison yard at Cilli and summarily shot. Photographers recorded the murders for posterity and propaganda. On June 25, 1942, Heinrich Himmler the second most powerful and feared man in Nazi Germany issued orders to his secret police and SS officers to eliminate partisan resistance. This campaign possesses every required element to make harmless the population which has supported the bandits and provided them with human resources, weapons and shelter. Men from such families, and often even their relatives, must be shot, the women locked up and transported to concentration camps, and the children must be torn from their motherland and instead accommodated in the territories of the old Reich. I expect to be provided with a special report on the number of children and their racial values. Against this bloody backdrop, 1,262 people many the surviving relatives of the partisans executed as an example to the rest of the population assembled in the school yard that August morning to await their fate. Among them was a family from the nearby village of Sauerbrunn. Johann Matko came from a family of known partisans: his brother, Ignaz, had been one of those lined up and shot against the wall of Cilli Prison in July and he had been dragged off to Mauthausen concentration camp. After seven months he was allowed to return home to his wife, Helena, and their three children: eight-year-old Tanja, her brother Ludwig then six and nine-month-old baby Erika. When all the families were accounted for, an order was given to separate them into three groups one each for the children, the women, and the men. Under Lurker's direction the soldiers moved in and pulled children from the grasp of their mothers: a local photographer, Josip Pelikan, recorded the harrowing scene for the Reich's obsessive archivists. His rolls of film captured the fear and alarm of women and children alike; Pelikan also snapped off shots of scores of toddlers held in low pens of straw inside the school buildings. As the mothers waited outside, Nazi officials began a cursory examination of the children. Working with charts and clipboards, they painstakingly noted down each child's facial and physical characteristics. These, though, were not medical tests as any doctor would know them; instead they were crude assessments of racial value that assigned each youngster to one of four categories. Those who met Himmler's strict criteria for what a child of true German blood should look like were placed in Category 1 or 2: this

formally registered them as potentially useful additions to the Reich population. By contrast, any hint or trace of Slavic features and certainly any sign of Jewish heritage caused a child to be consigned to the lowest racial status of Categories 3 and 4. Thus branded as Untermensch, they had no value except as future slave labor for the Nazi state. By the following day this rudimentary sifting was finished. Some children those deemed racially worthless were handed back to their families. But 430 other youngsters from young babies to twelve-year-old boys and girls were taken away by their captors. Rounded up by nurses from the German Red Cross, they were packed into trains and transported across the Yugoslavian border to an Umsiedlungslager or transit camp at Frohnleiten, near the Austrian town of Graz. They did not stay long in this holding center. By September 1942 a further selection had been made this time by trained race assessors from one of the myriad organizations established by Himmler to preserve and strengthen the pool of good blood. Noses were measured and compared to the official ideal length and shape; lips, teeth, hips, and genitals were likewise prodded, poked, and photographed to sort the genetically precious human wheat from the less valuable chaff. This finer, more rigorous sieving was used to reassign the captives to the four racial categories. Older children newly listed in Categories 3 or 4 were shipped off to reeducation camps across Bavaria in the very heartland of Nazi Germany. The best of the younger ones in the top two categories would in time be handed over to a secretive project run by the Reichsführer himself. Its name was Lebensborn; and among the infants assigned to its care was a nine-month-old baby called Erika Matko.

TWO 1945 Year Zero It is our will that this state shall endure for a thousand years. We are happy to know that the future is ours entirely!

ADOLF HITLER, TRIUMPH OF THE WILL, 1935 AT 2:40 A.M. on Monday, May 7, 1945, in a small, redbrick schoolhouse in the French city of Reims, Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, chief of operations for the German Armed Forces High Command, signed the unconditional surrender of the Thousand Year Reich. The five terse paragraphs of this act of capitulation handed over Germany and all its inhabitants to the mercy of the four victorious Allied Powers Britain, America, France, and the Soviet Union from 11:01 p.m. the following night. A week earlier, Hitler and most of his inner circle had committed suicide in the bowels of the Berlin Führerbunker. His chief henchman, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler the man in charge of the entire Nazi apparatus of terror was on the run, disguised in the coarse gray serge of an enlisted soldier and equipped with forged papers proclaiming him to be a humble sergeant. It was over; six years of total war in which my country had murdered and plundered its way across Europe were finished. Now we had to live with the peace. Who were we that May morning? What was Germany once the begetter of Bach and Beethoven, Goethe and Schiller in the aftermath of the brutality of the Blitzkrieg, let alone the filth and genocide of the Final Solution? What would peace look like to the victors and to the vanquished? Those would prove to be two very different questions, linked by a common answer. A new term was coined to describe our situation in 1945: die Stunde Null. Literally translated, this means zero hour; but for the smoldering remains of Germany a country of ruins, shame, and starvation it was more accurately year zero: both an end and a beginning. What did it mean to be a German from 11:01 p.m. on Tuesday, May 8, 1945? To the Allies the new owners of every meter of turf and of every individual life from the Mass in the west to the Memel in the east it meant subjugation, suspicion, and suppression. Never again, said the four occupying powers, would the poisonous twin rivers of German nationalism and militarism be allowed to rise up and flood across the continent. There would, within hours, be mechanisms and procedures put in place to enforce this noble ideal systems that, though I was too young to know then, would direct the course of my life.

TO GERMANS, THIS existential question of identity meant something different again. Something much less philosophical, something that could be categorized as the three Ps: physical, political, and psychological. And of this trinity, the greatest the most pressing was undoubtedly the physical. Germany in May 1945 was a wasteland; a tortured tundra of blown-up bridges, torn-up roads, burned-out tanks. In the dying weeks and months of his Reich, consumed by madness and impotent rage, Hitler had issued orders to create fortress cities. The Fatherland, he pronounced, was to be defended to the last drop of pure German blood and the last brick of German building. There was to be no surrender, but, instead, a Götterdämmerung of flame and sacrifice to mark the final days of his self-proclaimed Master Race. The result was less a noble funeral pyre than a thousand-mile-wide bonfire of his vanity. Forced to fight for every inch of territory and bludgeoned by Allied carpet-bombing Germany was reduced to a post-apocalyptic desert. The once-mighty Reich buildings were reduced to piles of rubble; in Berlin alone there were seventy-five million tons of it piled up along and across almost every street. And as Berlin, so, too, the rest of the German cities; destroyed and obliterated by bombing and house-to-house fighting that damaged or left derelict 70 percent of all their buildings. And everywhere, now hollow-eyed and haggard, the once-arrogant people who had subjugated those they believed to be inferior races to the iron destiny of Germany's future. Newsreels and photos Allied ones, since the German press had been shut down from the moment of surrender captured previously unimaginable scenes. Clustered around half-destroyed buildings, blown apart so that glimpses of a once normal life a fireplace, shreds of wallpaper, the remains of a toilet gaped obscenely in the absence of their protective walls, were the living ghosts of women and children. Orphans, refugees, the aged and the wounded; everywhere a dystopian tableau of anonymous bodies lying in the street, watched or more often avoided by skeletal figures who might well soon join them in death. What were they what were we doing? All of Germany, at least in the cities, was picking through debris, creating makeshift shelters, scrounging for food and either hiding from or fearfully fraternizing with the victorious occupying armies. Not from choice but from necessity. For there was one thing missing more vital even than shelter:

food. In the last weeks of the war, the country's economy so long directed by and for the benefit of the Nazi party had collapsed as completely as its buildings. Ironically, there was plenty of money, but the wads of paper and mounds of coin were useless; as every available resource was diverted away from the people to the needs of the army, and as explosions ripped up the railway network, preventing what food was harvested from being distributed, there was little or nothing to buy with the now-useless marks. Nor did our new masters appear to have a coherent idea of what to do with us. Between July and August 1945, the Allied leaders Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin met at Potsdam to plan the future. Unlike the end of the First World War, when Germany was defeated and subjected to severe punishment and reparations but not wiped from the geographical and political map, at Potsdam the decision was taken that the country would cease to exist once the war against Hitler ended. In its place there would be four separate occupation zones, each owned and ruled by one of the war's victors, according to its own unique principles and plans. But beyond that there had been little concerted thinking about what, practically, would be done with the former German state once Hitler and his thugs had been defeated. France had favored breaking the Reich into a series of small independent states, while the United States had considered returning Germany to the condition of a preindustrialized nation focused and dependent on farming. Washington would come to relent, to accept that requiring tens of millions of Germans to live as medieval peasants was unworkable as well as undesirable. But the Allies failed to contemplate how their separate occupations would function, and none of their plans addressed the monumental problem of feeding both a conquered people a population swelled by more than ten million refugees from the east and the massive armies imposing the peace. Food: there was simply not enough of it and without a functioning transport system, what little there was could not be moved to the places where it was most needed. Worse, there was a widespread feeling among the occupying armies that Germans were long overdue a taste of their own medicine; had the Nazi rampage across Europe not deliberately starved villages, towns, cities, and entire nations to the point of death? Wasn't it time for Germany to reap what she had sown? This, then, was Hitler's true legacy: a nation starving and being starved to death; a population reduced to a desperate struggle for survival in which men, women, and children subsisted on half the calories needed to sustain life. At best, a country not simply beaten and half destroyed but wiped completely out of existence. I was three and a half when peace came. A small, quiet, and archetypally blond German child, living in Bandekow, a tiny hamlet in the rural heart of the Mecklenburg region, with my mother, grandmother, and slightly older brother Dietmar. Our home was a big farmhouse, half timbered and characteristic of the region, set in acres of forest. We were, I think, typical both of a particular class of prewar Germans and, by contrast, of the postwar country at large. On both sides maternal and paternal our family was old, well established, and, notwithstanding the wrecked economy, well off. My mother, Gisela, was the daughter of a shipping line magnate from Hamburg. The Andersens belonged to the old Hanseatic class the patrician and prestigious ruling elite that had made its money and its name from trade since the Congress of Vienna declared Hamburg a free city in 1815. Our house in Bandekow had been in my mother's family for generations; it belonged to my grandmother's brother, but had almost certainly been used as a country retreat in the years before 1945. Certainly the Andersens kept their main residence in Hamburg itself, and my grandfather remained there, with my grandmother dividing her time between the two homes. Gisela was one of four Andersen children. Her brother had been killed, serving in the Wehrmacht in the last days of the war; her eldest sister was estranged the result of some unspoken act of dishonesty that tarnished the otherwise respectable family name but her remaining sibling, my aunt Ingrid (known universally as Erika, or Eka), was a constant companion in my childhood. At the end of the war, Gisela was thirty-one: young, bright, albeit in the brittle and privileged way of her class and pretty. She was also married and not, as it turned out, happily. HERMANN VON OELHAFEN was a career soldier. He had served with honor in the First War; he was seriously injured in 1914, again in 1915, and, after a final wound in 1917, was awarded the Iron Cross for his pains. Like Gisela, he came from an aristocratic background: both his father and his mother could boast the telltale von a signifier of the upper class in their family names. But where Gisela was young and lively, Hermann was the complete opposite. He was thirty years older than Gisela and suffered from severe epileptic seizures. Whether these were the cause of his peevish, mean-spirited nature I do not know; what I am certain of is that their marriage which took place in 1935, during the first confident years of Hitler's reign was, by 1945, effectively over. As I grew from being a toddler to a young child, I rarely saw my father; while we lived in the farmhouse at Bandekow, Hermann lived a thousand kilometers away in the Bavarian town of Ansbach. Perhaps outwardly there was nothing strange in Gisela a married woman living alone with her children and mother. In this our little family was all too typical of our now-dissolved nation in the immediate months after the war: most adult men even the very young and the elderly had been drafted into military service and were now either dead, missing, or locked up in prisoner-of-war camps across Europe. Germany was a country more accurately, a former country of women and children. But though, as we shall see, it played its part, the war was not the prime reason for the separation of my parents. There was simply an unbridgeable gulf between them an emotional fracture even less open to resolution than the divisions imposed upon their nation. I was then too young to know this, but it would, in time, come to render my childhood as bleak as the politically deteriorating situation in which we found ourselves. Bleaker, probably. Politics. The second P that defined life at the end of the war. Not politics as modern generations have come to know and disregard it; not the jockeying for position and power between rival parties in a settled democracy, no, politics in 1945 was red in tooth and claw. The last

days of the war had seen the Allied forces smashing their way through Germany from all parts of the compass. American tanks and troops rolled eastward from France, Belgium, and Holland; the British fought their way northward, up through the country from Italy and Austria; and the vast armies of the Soviet Union raced westward from what had been, before the war, Poland. For each there was an overriding imperative to conquer and control as much German territory as possible; whatever they held when the war finally ended would, under the Potsdam agreement become their property with very little prospect of any subsequent redistribution. In those last weeks of spring 1945 the borders of postwar Europe were being re-created and, at the same time, the seeds of what would shortly be known as the Cold War were being planted. When the fighting was over, it turned out that my father's home was in the American zone; henceforth his fate would depend on the way Washington viewed its duties and rights over the territory it now owned. But Bandekow, where I lived with my mother, grandmother, and Dietmar, my slightly elder brother, was in the Soviet occupation zone, and Moscow had very different ideas about how to dismantle the infrastructure of Nazi Germany as well as what it wanted to do with its share of the former Reich. Initially, at least, there was agreement between the Allies on the need to bring Hitler's surviving henchmen to justice. A four-power war crimes tribunal was established to put the National Socialist machine on trial; Gring, Jodl, Hess, von Ribbentrop, and twenty other leaders of the National Socialist state were locked up in cells beneath the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg to await trial for crimes of war and crimes against humanity. Other than Hitler and Goebbels, the most notable absentee from this roll call of infamy was Himmler: the man who had created the SS and who had masterminded the entire apparatus of Nazi terror, had committed suicide before he could be transported to Nuremberg. THE EVENTUAL TRIAL and conviction of these vicious war criminals was undoubtedly a triumph for justice, but it also marked the high point of cooperation between the occupying powers. After Nuremberg, America, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union would each take a radically different approach to ruling the land and populations they controlled; the individual fates of tens of millions of former Germans depended on which zone they happened to have been in when the war ended. Very soon these great political divides would change forever the lives of our little family. The contrast between the four occupying powers was played out first in the way they viewed those who had been members of the Nazi Party. Denazification was a term coined in Washington during the last years of war: President Franklin Roosevelt and his successor, Harry Truman, recognized that the party's tendrils had wound themselves throughout every aspect of German life, from the political to the judicial, from the public to the personal. In May 1945 there were more than eight million members of the Nazi Party around 10 percent of the total population. What was to be done about this entwining of the mechanics of fascism with the warp and weft of everyday life? The search for an answer was not, of course, confined to America. Each of the Allied powers now controlled its own swath of Germany; each faced the problem of how to pull out the roots of National Socialism and yet somehow ensure that their own zone of occupation kept functioning. The first step was to outlaw the party. On September 20, 1945, Control Council Proclamation No. 2 announced that The National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) is completely and finally abolished and declared to be illegal throughout all the former Reich. But the party itself was only the most visible of a byzantine tangle of Nazi organizations. Beneath it were more than sixty other official associations, ranging from internationally notorious bodies like the SS, Gestapo, and Hitler Youth to much more obscure societies (even within Germany) such as the Reich Committee for the Protection of German Blood and the Deutsche Frauenschaft, the National Socialist Womens Movement. All were duly made illegal; more importantly, previous association with any one of them would be enough to flag a member as someone to be suspected as a Nazi sympathizer. Neither Hermann nor Gisela was the best of my knowledge a party member. Neither did I ever hear them express fascist opinions or support for Hitler. But their personal histories—my father as a career soldier, who had been a desk officer in the Wehrmacht for much of the war, my mother as a former member of Deutsche Frauenschaft—must have led to some investigations by denazification officials of their respective occupation zones. AND THIS IS where the divergence in approach between the American rulers of my father's region and the Soviet masters who now controlled the area in which my mother, Dietmar, and I lived, would determine the differing courses of our lives. The Americans were initially fiercely committed to denazification, but then became the most pragmatic of the occupying armies. Washington's military government realized quickly that, however desirable, widespread purges of suspected Nazis would mean that the entire responsibility for organizing day-to-day life fell exclusively on its shoulders—a burden that, for a war-weary nation anxious to bring its troops home, was simply too onerous. And so while my father, like every adult living in the American zone, was required to fill out a questionnaire (termed variously a Fragebogen or a Meldebogen) in which he affirmed that he was not, and never had been, a member of any Nazi organization, there was little follow-up or detailed examination of these self-declarations. With little or no oversight, most applicants were issued official documents pronouncing them to be good Germans, free of the stain of fascism. They quickly became known as Persilscheine—pieces of paper that were able to wash the past as clean as any soap powder.