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→ Sons and Daughters of Third Reich Leaders Find Voice in New Book

When author Gerald Posner approached Random House executive editor Bob Loomis with the idea of interviewing the grown children of the most powerful Nazi leaders, Loomis thought it was a splendid but impossible idea: "First of all, no one had ever been able to find them.

And if these children hadn't yet talked, why would they now?"

Two years later, after six extended trips to Germany and untold hours of labor and luck, Posner turned in *Hitler's Children: Sons and Daughters of Leaders of the Third Reich Talk About Their Fathers and Themselves* (\$21), to be published on May 13 with a 20,000-copy first printing.

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Göring. Hess. Mengele. Dönitz. What is it like to be the children of men whose names evoke the darkest crimes of humankind? For publicist Kent Holland, *Hitler's Children* asks a different question: "What are Germans whose fathers were the architects of Nazism doing today with this horrible legacy?"

Posner's journey to this subject was atypical. He's half-Jewish, half-Catholic, and attended Catholic schools as a child. There were no personal reasons for what he calls his "obsession." No one in his family was killed in the Holocaust, nor was anyone a survivor of the camps. But as a young lawyer, he was approached by a friend to take on the case of a survivor of Mengele's medical experiments who wanted to sue

the Mengele family and the German government.

"The lawsuit went nowhere," Posner recalls. "We couldn't prove that the Mengele family had links to the fugitive, and we couldn't sue a foreign government in a U.S. court. But Argentina let me into their Federal Police Archives, and I had access to Paraguay's Interpol file. I got hooked."

The result was *Mengele: The Complete Story* (Dell), published in 1986 and critically acclaimed as the definitive biography of the "Angel of Death." Posner gave 20% of the book's American proceeds to Mark Berkowitz, the survivor who had inspired his exploration.

The idea for *Hitler's Children* began to germinate in 1985, when the then 30-year-old Posner was invited, along with four internationally recognized historians, to validate for the German magazine *Bunte* the 5000 pages of diaries and letters that Mengele's son, Rolf, had finally decided to make public after his father's death was conclusively proven.

It was Posner's first encounter with the child of a Nazi murderer. As he writes in the introduction to *Hitler's Children*, "The conversations that June [with Rolf Mengele] sparked my curiosity about whether other children of prominent Nazis felt the same as Mengele's son"—a complex range of emotions from condemnation to family loyalty.

Many of Posner's 10 subjects have lived all their lives in a state of denial to one degree or another, a state captured by Edda Göring's comment: "I actually expect that almost everybody has a favorable opinion of my father, except maybe in America." Some of the children had no opportunity to confront their Nazi fathers, who died as war criminals condemned by the Allies. Others chose silence even in the face of sure knowledge. But a few faced the truth about their unsought legacies.

One of the most moving stories is that of Dagmar Drexel, the only child in the book who knew nothing of her father's Nazi past until adulthood. Her father, Max Drexel, who served in an exemplary manner in the murderous Einsatzgruppen D—charged with the massive liquidation of Jews and other civilians on the Eastern Front—is still alive; daughter and father are now completely estranged.

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HITLER'S CHILDREN

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF LEADERS OF THE THIRD REICH TALK ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FATHERS
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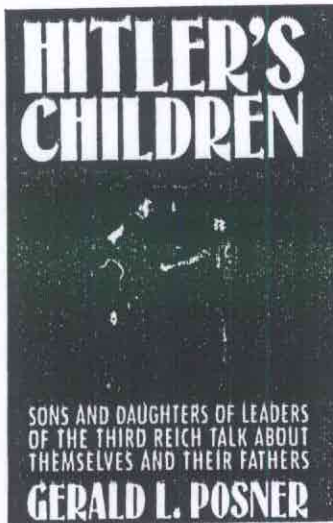
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