

IRMGARD MUELLER
BORN IN GERMANY, 1920

Irmgard had a very pleasant and privileged childhood. She went to school and had many aspirations for the future. When she was 12 years old, Hitler came to power and things changed. By then she went to training school in Berlin to learn bookkeeping, sewing, and fashion design.

In 1938 Kristallnacht happened. The windows were shattered, the synagogues were destroyed, and a lot of looting occurred. The schools were closed and she went home. It took three hours by train. Her house was upside down. The National Socialist Party forced them to sell their house for a minimum and they had to live in one room. The money was with a party member.

From 1940-41 she was taken to a labor camp and then an agriculture camp. In 1943 they gathered in Humburger Strasse near the cemetery. They were 1000 people taken by train and arrived in Birkenau on Hitler's birthday in 1943. The situation was very nebulous. They separated men from women, young from old. They stripped them, shaved, examined, and tattooed numbers on their arms.

There was a lot of crying and fear. They were put into barracks where there was no room to stretch, so they took turns. The sanitary conditions were primitive, really terrible. Dissentery was explosive. There was little food or water. Once she reached for water, she was denied and beaten severely. Later she volunteered for additional jobs to get a little more food. Role call was a standing procedure. If someone was missing they stood for hours in the cold until they were accounted for. An officer who knew them in Berlin came to Birkenau and looked for them; they were sent to better jobs and better accommodations. They were taken to barracks with better sanitary conditions and there was also more food for them.

Eventually she ended up in Auschwitz and worked in an office as a bookkeeper. When there were attacks by the American bombers in 1944 they had to go to shelters. In January 18, 1945 they were supposed to pack up the supplies and be marched out because they knew too much. By then there were only 80 people. They were not dressed properly, and there was a lot of snow and no water. They were taken to Ravensbruck where it was very overcrowded. One day they cut across the street to a farmer who

put them up and gave them food. By then the war was over.

The Red Cross helped the nationals to get out of Germany to Sweden and in 1947 she arrived in America. Asked to what she attributed her survival, she said it was sheer luck.