

MAGDALENA KUSSEROW

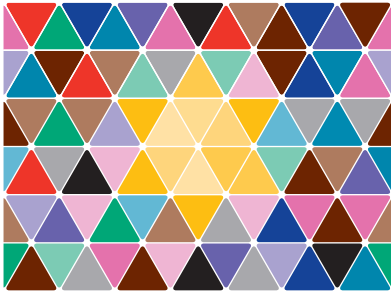


United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Waltraud and Annemarie Kusserow



Mosaic – Victims of
Nazi Persecution





Magdalena Kusserow

Magdalena Kusserow was born on 23rd January 1924 in Bochum in Germany. She was the eighth of

eleven children. During the 1920s her parents Franz and Hilda became Jehovah's Witnesses and they brought up their children in their new faith. In 1931 they moved to the small town of Bad Lippspringe where their house became a centre of Witness activity. They held Bible study classes in their home and distributed religious literature in local communities.

Magdalena joined in this missionary work when she was 12 years old. However, by this time the Nazis had come to power and were persecuting Jehovah's Witnesses. After the family were denounced by local Catholic priests, the Gestapo regularly searched the Kusserows' house looking for illegal Witness literature. Magdalena and her sisters hid the books during these searches. However, her parents were still arrested in 1936: although Hilda was released after six weeks, Franz stayed in prison until 1940.

Despite Franz's arrest, the Kusserows continued to follow their faith and they suffered increasing persecution as a

result. Apart from Magdalena's brother Siegfried, who died in an accident before the war, every member of the family became a victim of the Nazis. In 1939 Magdalena's three youngest siblings were taken from the family and sent to Nazi-controlled foster homes. Two of her older brothers were executed for refusing to serve in the German army. All of the other brothers and sisters were sent to prison or concentration camps; one brother died after the war as a result of the maltreatment he suffered in the camps.

Magdalena's turn came in April 1941 when she was arrested along with her parents and her sister Hildegard. As Magdalena was still legally a child, she was held in a juvenile prison until she was 18 in 1942. She was told that she could go home if she signed a statement abandoning her religion but she refused. Instead she was sent to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women, where she worked in the camp garden and looked after the children of SS men. Within a year she was joined by her mother and sister Hildegard and they stayed together in the camp for the remainder of the war.

In April 1945 the women were forced on a Death March from Ravensbrück but were liberated by the American army. They returned to their home in Bad Lippspringe with the other members of the family who survived the war.