

= Ika Hügel @-@ Marshall =

Erika " Ika " Hügel @-@ Marshall (born 13 March 1947) is an Afro @-@ German author and activist . She helped found the organization ADEFRA and the Afro @-@ Deutsch movement . Her autobiography , Daheim unterwegs (published as Invisible Woman in English) , discusses racism in Germany and her search for a family identity . She has been influenced by and has praised the work of her friend , American activist Audre Lorde .

Hügel @-@ Marshall was born to a German mother and African @-@ American father , whom she did not meet until she was 46 . She experienced severe racism as a child , especially during her time in an orphanage . She studied well and helped to modernise a children 's home in Frankfurt am Main . In the 1980s she helped establish the Afro @-@ Deutsch movement and became interested in Lorde 's work . Daheim unterwegs was published in 1998 and has been described as highlighting issues within German racism . She has since given talks and readings , based on the autobiography , at universities and festivals .

= = Biography = =

= = = Childhood = = =

Erika Hügel @-@ Marshall was born on 13 March 1947 , the child of a Bavarian woman and an African @-@ American soldier , Eddie Marshall , who had returned to the US before her birth . Her parents had met just after the end of World War II , after a relaxation of laws forbidding military personnel from interacting with civilians . According to her , black soldiers treated native German children well , distributing food and clothing , but her parents generally met in secret due to racist remarks from others . In November 1946 her father returned to the US after an illness . By that time , both of them knew that her mother was pregnant , but she did not know he was leaving until after he was already gone . A year after Ika 's birth , her mother married a former officer in Hitler 's Sturmabteilung (SA) , a paramilitary wing of the Nazi party , and a half @-@ sister was born the following year . Her mother and grandmother loved her and treated her like any other child , despite social disapproval . She was close to her half @-@ sister , but her step @-@ father was distant toward her .

Despite her recollections of a pleasant early childhood , Hügel @-@ Marshall was singled out for her skin colour . Growing up , she faced constant racism and was referred to by the local community as a Negermischling ; Mischling was the term used by the Nazis to designate " mixed " children (with a Jewish and a non @-@ Jewish parent) . In 1952 , when she was ready to start school , her mother was forced by social services to send her to the orphanage God 's Little Cabin Children 's Home . She lived there for the rest of her childhood , despite promises that it was only temporary , that she would only be there for six weeks . At the home , she endured mental and physical abuse from both adults and children . This included being shouted at to stop crying for her mother , being force @-@ fed her own vomit , and undergoing an exorcism , during which she was blindfolded and forced to repeat such phrases as " Satan , I cast you out " and " Lord Jesus , purify my black soul . " She was allowed to go home for summer vacations ; she never told her family about her bad experiences at the children 's home .

Hügel @-@ Marshall performed well at school , often finishing top of the class , and taught herself to swim , but was still patronised by the nuns teaching her , who said " we never expected much from you " . Teachers told her she would never amount to anything : she would be promiscuous , have children out of wedlock , become an alcoholic , and do no better than find a job in childcare . She begged to go to a school where she could get higher education and become a teacher , but instead she was transferred to a boarding school where she was taught how to work with young children . After two years of training she was unable to find employment , although her white roommate immediately found a position .

= = = Adulthood = = =

Hügel @-@ Marshall continued to study and achieved a licence in child education and welfare . She then found work in a children 's home in Frankfurt am Main , where she worked for twelve years . The home reminded her of the degrading orphanage she had been sent to and seemed more like a detention center than a school . Working with the other teachers , and over the opposition of the school 's management , she was able to make substantial changes and to modernise it during her time there . While working there , she completed a degree in social work and pedagogy .

In Frankfurt she met and married a white German man named Alexander . Her family and his attended the wedding , but several incidents illustrated once again how German society treated her as " invisible " . When she and Alexander went to get their marriage license , the registrar greeted Alexander , wrote down his name , and then asked " Where is the bride ? " As they were descending the courthouse steps after their wedding , a passerby offered wedding congratulations to the maid of honor . She ignored the incidents even though " I am troubled by this continual need to point out to others that it is I who am getting married . " After six years she and Alexander divorced .

Hügel @-@ Marshall became active in the women 's rights movement while in Frankfurt . But even among her feminist activist colleagues she felt isolated , because she was the only black woman there . She had never met another black German , and from her years in the children 's home she had learned to think of blacks (including herself) as inferior and immoral . Years later she commented that " the most disastrous thing I learned at the home was self @-@ hatred . " In 1986 , she attended a meeting of Afro @-@ Germans ; she was 39 years old and it was the first time she had ever seen " a black face that wasn 't my own . " She was empowered by the sense of community and became an activist for Afro @-@ Germans , studying their history and asserting their legitimacy in a society that still assumed that all Germans must be white .

In 1965 she attempted to find her father , and wrote him a letter explaining her situation , but the letter was returned marked " insufficient address " . She never gave up the hope of finding him and when , in 1990 , she moved to Berlin , she met people who offered to help her trace her father and that side of her family . In 1993 , at the age of 46 , she finally met her father and his large American family in Chicago , where she was welcomed and accepted as an equal . Hügel @-@ Marshall later said " here is my journey 's end " , referring to the meeting , adding " I knew my survival in a white racist society was not for nothing " . He died the following year .

Hügel @-@ Marshall has taught gender studies and psychological counselling in Berlin , having gained a degree in social pedagogics . She works as a psychotherapist with an inter @-@ cultural focus , and is also an artist who specialises in color drawings and wood sculpture .

= = Activism = =

In Munich in 1986 , Hügel @-@ Marshall co @-@ founded the Afro @-@ Deutsch women 's movement ADEFRA . " ADEFRA " is short for " afrodeutsche Frauen " (Afro @-@ German Women) . It uses literature and the media to call attention to the status of Afro @-@ Germans as " statistically invisible and yet uncomfortably conspicuous . [sic] " She and other German @-@ born , German @-@ speaking people with African ancestry were commonly not accepted as German because of their skin colour . The Afro @-@ Deutsch movement , a forerunner to the Black European identity movement , used community building " to resist marginalization and discrimination , to gain social acceptance , and to construct a cultural identity for themselves . "

Hügel @-@ Marshall 's work has been influenced by American civil rights activist Audre Lorde . Lorde was living in Germany when ADEFRA was founded , and encouraged Afro @-@ Germans to come together and discuss their lives . She encouraged them to write their autobiographies , which Hügel @-@ Marshall did . She and Lorde first met in 1987 , by which time Hügel @-@ Marshall had read substantial material of Lorde 's work and was excited that they would meet . In 2012 , she attended the Audre Lorde Legacy Cultural Festival in Chicago with lesbian activist Dagmar Schultz . Hügel @-@ Marshall has a positive relationship with Chicago , as it was here she found her father .

= = Autobiography = =

In 1998 Hügel @-@ Marshall published her autobiography , Daheim unterwegs : Ein deutsches Leben , chronicling her experiences surviving as a black woman in Germany . Daheim means " at home " while unterwegs means " on the way " or " in transit " ; the combination is a deliberate oxymoron suggesting someone seeking a home in her own country . The English translation of the book , published in 2001 by Continuum International Publishers , is titled Invisible Woman : Growing Up Black in Germany ; an annotated English version was published by Peter Lang Publishing in 2008 . The book explores the relationship with her father and with Germany , and describes a search for her identity .

The book has won the Audre Lorde Literary award and has been read by Hügel @-@ Marshall at public events across Germany , Austria and the US . It has been described as " an intensely moving journey in search of herself ... a personal story , but also a microcosm of racism in contemporary Germany " and " in many ways , paradigmatic for the Black @-@ German experience . " In 2007 she gave a reading and seminar on the book at the University of Rochester and in 2012 , she gave a public reading at the Goethe Institute 's annual Berlin & Beyond Film Festival .