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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

A Doctor's Journey: A Hungarian's Realization of the American Dream
Laszlo Makk
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Well written stories by individuals who overcome unbelievable obstacles are addictive and inspiring. These powerful memoirs help put life's small victories and failures into perspective as they celebrate the invincibility of the human spirit. *A Doctor's Journey* is such a story, an uplifting whirlwind from start to finish, spanning nearly eighty years of one extraordinary man's hard fought and well-lived life.

From Laszlo Makk's auspicious birth to a prosperous shoemaker in a small Hungarian village in 1932, to his impulsive, yet unwavering decision as a small boy that he would be a doctor one day, Makk's early life was sylvan and uneventful. But WWII, under Nazi and then Soviet oppression, forced him to grow up quickly. From the time he was ten years old, when he was asked by his parents to risk his life and throw a cooked duck over the fence to some family friends in the Jewish ghetto, his world became very interesting.

Makk faced jaw-dropping danger, shocking injustice, witnessing craven brutality, most of it after the war at the hands of occupying Soviet armed forces.

Using a sublime combination of diplomacy, perspicacity, integrity, and dumb luck, Makk put himself through several years of medical school. When his courageous anti-Soviet political and humanitarian behavior got him on too many lists, he escaped to Austria.

In record time, he was able to immigrate to the US, making friends with a wealthy couple who helped him get settled, find a job, and return to medical school—a feat in itself. Foreigners with poor English skills were almost never admitted, and those few who made it in flunked out. But Markk was an anomaly, and in his relentless passion to achieve fulfillment of his quixotic goal to be an "American doctor," he never wavered. He excelled in every specialty, earned the admiration of world renowned surgeons while still a student and graduating with honors.

The next fifty years of his life were only slightly less manic. Makk married and had four sons, all the while he was working over a hundred hours a week as a surgeon and later as a

pathologist. The family settled on a large horse farm in Kentucky, and though he endured several life threatening illnesses, his fortitude and access to impeccable care enabled him to continue working into his seventies. His wife's long battle with cancer became the focus of his life after retirement, and he began writing his memoir shortly after her death.

A Doctor's Journey would be enjoyed by many audiences, but its consummate home is in the hands of a medical professional. Makk has a propensity for sharing the details of medicine in all its complexity and drama, something a layperson might find tedious. Every aspect of the illnesses and surgeries he was involved in are carefully documented as though he is making a report. His understandable desire to include the name of every doctor he'd ever worked with also feels unnecessary at times. Fortunately, these minor flaws pale in light of Makk's excellent writing and superlative story.

Patty Sutherland