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Autobiography & Memoir

All the Pretty Shoes
Marika Roth
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There are many memoirs about World War II, each with its own story of atrocities, devastation, and triumph. Memoirs help make history real; names, dates, and events are important, but it's the personal suffering of the people involved that cause readers to feel the human pain woven into nearly every story.

Marika Roth knows about suffering. As a child, she was subjected to negligent relatives and abusive boarding schools while her mother spent time in a sanatorium, dying of tuberculosis. At twelve years old, she and her father were separated forever when the Nazis ordered men and boys to march from the housing in which they thought they were safe. A few days later, she was shot at, along with a crowd of other Jews; only by pretending to be dead did she escape the soldiers. A day later, hiding in the bushes at a park, she witnessed the murder of hundreds of Jews along the banks of the Danube River.

Alone, starving, her hair infested with lice and feet protected from the snow and cold with only newspaper, Roth relied on her fierce spirit and keen resourcefulness to rise above her miserable existence and survive until the next heartache. For even as she found her way out of one horror, another waited for her on a different shore.

One of Roth's many strengths as a writer is her ability to tease the details of her experience to the surface to greater reflect the suffering at the core of her experiences. For example, a few days before her father is taken away by Nazis, Roth gets her first menstrual cramp: "Once back in our quarter, I discovered blood in my underwear which I learned was the reason for my pain…Although I was embarrassed to tell Father, I cuddled up to him, promising that I would love him forever." In the next paragraph, she gets her last glimpse of her father as he is marched off with all the other males.

Roth, formerly a fashion model and now an artist and writer, makes no attempt to hide

her own fallibility as she reveals the cruelty of others. She does not come across as an innocent in her tale of trial and woe but fully admits to her own mistakes and acts of ignorance. Readers will be attracted to this inherently human character.

Though there are plenty of memoirs on the market, replete with new details of human suffering, there is always space for one that combines good writing with a compelling, applicable story. *All the Pretty Shoes* will help make the Hungarian experience of WWII a more familiar one, and inspire resilience in those who read about Roth's journey to well-being.

Andi Diehn