

Angels Always Come on Time

Chaim Linder

Mark Linder

Lulu (Mar 5, 2018)

Softcover \$31.99 (668pp)

978-1-4834-7662-9

Chaim Linder's remarkable memoir reaches into widely interesting territory.

Angels Always Come on Time is a memoir that reaches into the realm of epics and odysseys as well as being a religious and cultural history. In its present form, it is a family story that will be passed along to delight and inform generations to come.

This memoir stands with the best of its kind, rendered in delicious detail by a brilliant yet ordinary man: a grandson, son, father, and grandfather. Toward the end of his life, Chaim Linder began writing, with an unflagging sense of aliveness, this story for his sons. "Lives, like buildings, require foundations," he wrote. "As others have done for me, I shall do for them."

The "foundation" that was laid for Chaim Linder is fully shown in this memoir, beginning with his grandparents on both sides, Hasidic Jews from villages near Warsaw. In the late nineteenth century, as violence and oppression against Jews increased in Eastern Europe, many longed for their ancestral, spiritual center—Jerusalem, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine. In 1879, the Linders moved their three children there. The youngest of those children was Haskel Linder, father of Chaim. The same year, Chaim's mother's family also left Poland.

Not born until 1907 and without the benefit of cameras or notebooks, Chaim looks back with firsthand authority to relate the stories he heard so often: of the markets and housing complexes, the schools and synagogues, the poor but civilized culture that grew in a protective ring around Jerusalem. The crime and squalor that Chaim's ancestors found in their idealized Holy City was daunting, but this "first great wave" of European immigrants would preside over Jerusalem's rebirth.

The story of his parents' marriage shows the heavy influence of tradition in the Hasidic culture. Men were not allowed to speak with young women, or date them, or choose brides, but when Chaim's mother and father first came face to face, the groom's father felt he had been struck by lightning. At the same moment, Mordecai, the *shadchan*, or matchmaker, spotted them and "stopped dead in his tracks." Chaim tells the story of their first meeting and of the bargaining session between Mordecai and his grandparents for the meager dowry that the bride's family would pay her suitor.

Chaim recounts with more wisdom than nostalgia the "honeymooned hours" of his youth, the cohesiveness and "claustrophobia" engendered by the Orthodox traditions and codes, the fall of the Ottomans and the rise of the British, the struggle to find his way in the world. He was twenty-two in 1929 when he sailed for New York in search of opportunity. After many more years and much hardship and struggle, he found his life's work and he found his true love, his freely chosen "dancing girl."

At well over six hundred pages, the book is certain to function as a treasured family memento, with frequent moments

that would attract wider interest. Little seems to be excluded, and some ponderings—as with Chaim’s struggle to balance the demands of his tradition with his need for autonomy—run long. While Mark Linder’s commentary is necessary and helpful, it intrudes on the text a bit too obviously in places and might have served better in chapter introductions or elsewhere.

Chaim Linder's remarkable memoir reaches into widely interesting territory.

JOE TAYLOR (April 21, 2018)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.