Clarion Review

Biography

Desperation: Surviving Hitler's Intention
Lydia Rychner-Reich
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Three Stars (out of Five)

The literature of the Holocaust is vast and ever-growing. The thousands of memoirs and autobiographies written by survivors can hardly be judged on their literary worth alone. These stories heart-rending and nearly unbelievable in their portrayal of suffering and degradation are not often well-written or organized for aesthetic effect but none of these criteria have meaning when reading about the writers' appalling experiences.

Lydia Rychner-Reich's book *Desperation* is one of these necessary accounts and the author herself knows (as she says often in these pages) that she is not writing for a literary prize but for a much larger reason: The story of her suffering is needed for the record; it is needed to drive home the message and the promise of "Never Again."

Lydia's story unfortunately is not unique. Her family was deported to Poland and shut into a Jewish ghetto. Lydia was separated from her family and sent to a detention center and later a slave labor camp. She survived terrible illness starvation humiliation and despair in the Graeben and Bergen-Belsen camps. She lost most of her family. "My beloved parents…were taken to Auschwitz" she writes. "Those brutal murderers had torn Mother from the hands of my father…robbing them of everything to the gas chambers. The same was true with Uncle Jacob his wife and his son." Her beloved sisters Ella and Cilly died in other camps.

The author somehow survived and made her way to the US after first being sent to Cyprus and then to Israel. She married another survivor and started a family naming her children after her sisters and other relatives she lost.

Running through her story is a message of hope: "My biggest prayer and hope" she writes "is that all men will come to realize that there is no such thing as a superior race that all of us are created equally before God and our fellow men."

The bravery strength of will and human force needed for survival are all emphasized in *Desperation*

. The voice of the author with its simple sentences tinged with a German accent still joins the chorus of voices that still cry out against the barbarity of the Hitler regime. Lydia's memoir cannot hide her anger and disgust but it clearly demonstrates her love and sympathy for her fellow-sufferers.

Readers will be touched and horrified by this book and at the same time heartened by its final message of love and hope. *Desperation* stands sturdily in the wall of survivor memoirs—a wall that serves to hold off any other such decline into cruelty and inhumanity.

James DenBoer