Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

From the Danube to the Hudson
Katherine Griesz
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Upon turning the first page of Katherine Griesz's memoir, *From the Danube to the Hudson*, one embarks on a journey through the history of Hungary as seen through the eyes of the author and her family. It is a rags-to-riches-to-rags adventure detailing times of happiness and tragedy as well as political stability and upheaval. It is also a telling personal tale that is fascinating to follow, one that speaks of courage, heartache, love, and challenges surmounted against incredible odds.

Griesz has a remarkable grasp on her family's history, such that she is able to introduce readers to her grandfather, Ignatius, and begin her memoir with him. Her family's fortune in Hungary has its start as a result of Ignatius's business acumen, and by the time Griesz is born, the family is flourishing: they are wealthy, successful, and well known. Through Griesz's eyes, readers also see Budapest in all its beauty: the Danube River that separates Buda from Pest; the city's rich cultural climate with theaters, restaurants, and shopping; and the family's summer home in Buda. It is easy to see why Kati, as she is then known, is a happy child.

But things start to change as Nazism creeps its way through Europe. Griesz's family is reluctant to leave, believing that nothing could change their beloved Hungary and that, in their corner of Europe, they would be protected. Under Ignatius's direction, all family members convert from Judaism to Christianity for added safety. Their worry and anxiety leaks into every crevice of the household—and with good reason. Eventually, their worst nightmares become true. Their friends are rounded up, many are shot dead into the Danube, and others are forced into ghettos, their property and possessions confiscated.

Griesz, her mother, and her grandmother survive, but just as they begin to pull their lives back together after the war, they are faced with a new threat: communism. The political turmoil is juxtaposed against the personal turmoil in her family as her mother sends a young Griesz to

Switzerland to study. Thus begins the author's spate of international travel, as she moves from Europe to Australia, back to Europe, and eventually to America, the country she has yearned to visit since she was a child.

Along the way, Kati learns painful lessons about family, love, marriage, and what it means to feel at home. She struggles to reconcile the affluent lifestyle of her past with her new economic situation, and she reflects on what she has both gained and lost in her life.

At close to five hundred pages, Griesz's memoir is a powerful and riveting read, at once a history lesson on Hungary and a deeply personal tale about a family's struggle to survive. The memoir isn't lighthearted, however, and the author's storytelling is often more laborious and detailed than it needs to be. For example, readers never feel the passion or romance of Griesz's second marriage, which she describes quickly and without a great deal of character development. Several other characters also remain undeveloped and, as a result, feel unfamiliar. Nevertheless, the intrigue of Griesz's story is sufficient to keep readers interested right up until the last page.

Lauren Kramer