



Innocence in a Turbulent World

Enda (Raudsepp) Bardell

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Its illustrations charming, Innocence in a Turbulent World is a striking memoir about a pivotal time in Estonia's history.

Enda Raudsepp Bardell's deft memoir *Innocence in a Turbulent World* returns to her childhood perceptions of her life on an isolated farm in Estonia during the German and Soviet occupations of World War II.

In 1944, Bardell's father escaped from his army conscription after being caught sneaking food to a concentration camp prisoner. On a dangerous walk across 200 miles, undertaken most often at night, he headed home. He hid in the forest surrounding the family farm, working with others to repair a fishing boat intended to sail to Sweden carrying five-year-old Enda, her baby sister, her parents, and seventy-eight other Estonians.

This dramatic childhood is recounted with image-filled prose, through Bardell's detailed map of her neighborhood, and in sparkling watercolor illustrations of farm and domestic scenes. The book describes a rural life that was full of hard work, but punctuated by the simple joys of helping with chores, learning to read, saunas, harvest events, and precious gifts of books and candies from an uncle. Descriptions capture the warmth and coziness of Bardell's earliest memories, layered with awareness of the increasing danger she faced from the occupying forces.

Though preserved from a tender age, these memories are lively and capture the self-centered sensibilities of early childhood. With her husband away, Bardell's mother was hard-pressed to keep an eye on their two small children; the daily demands of a garden, livestock, laundry, food preservation, and cooking were matters of survival. From Bardell's childhood vantage: it was annoying that her mother was too busy to pay attention to her. She recalls seeking companionship from the family pig and walking miles to visit her grandmother and playmate Maie—including wandering off to visit her friend without telling anyone, for which she received a sound spanking from her distraught mother.

The prose is earthy, direct, and unadorned, but conveys much emotion. Adult Bardell's nostalgia for cherished family members and neighbors, and for the pastoral beauty of her native land, is conjured alongside her childish understandings of, and confusion about, her father's absence, his curious return, and the uncertainty and fear of their sea voyage to safety. Several events from their flight, including a Soviet soldiers' search of a hayloft in which the family was hiding and Bardell's stealthy trip above decks on the fishing boat while Soviet ships passed by, underscore the dangers that the family faced traveling with rambunctious youngsters who could have unintentionally imperiled everyone.

Historic photographs of the Baltic shore meeting place and escape boat, as well as images of buildings from Bardell's return visit to her Estonian village, add visual details to further document this distinct place and way of life. On the same visit, she reconnected with her playmate, Maie, after seven decades apart. As Bardell wistfully notes, "Later, I sometimes wondered if I really existed at all before age five, as there are no photographs of me, only memories from a world left behind;" the contemporary images make Bardell's recollections all the more memorable.

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RACHEL JAGARESKI (January 27, 2020)

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