



Lenin, Hitler, and Me

Boris J. Kochanowsky

Vera Kochanowsky

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Lenin, Hitler, and Me is an exceptional account by a man who survived persecution.

In the insightful and gripping memoir *Lenin, Hitler, and Me*, Boris J. Kochanowsky recounts his indomitable will to survive persecution following the Russian Revolution and during the Nazi occupation of Europe.

Born in Siberia in 1905, Kochanowsky lived a prestigious and cultured life as the son of a wealthy businessman until the communist takeover of Russia, when his family's status rendered them enemies of the people. Living in constant terror and divested of their fortune, they escaped to Manchuria.

Kochanowsky later obtained a degree in mining engineering in Germany, becoming a world-renowned innovator in the field; his ultimate goal was to emigrate to the United States to build a life of prosperity. Hitler's rise to power and "twisted vision for mankind" made staying in Germany seem like a mistake, though, for the stateless citizen, who realized he needed to flee again. He undertook an Odyssean five-year journey through Europe to evade Nazi persecution and death, resulting in a story that is nothing short of phenomenal.

Originally completed in 1971, this memoir remained unpublished in Kochanowsky's lifetime. After his death, his daughter, Vera, revised and edited the manuscript, incorporating historical research, newly discovered family history, and interviews with her father.

While it's unknown the extent to which this version remains true to the original, one aspect is certain: it is a narrative masterpiece. Kochanowsky remains intact as the narrator of his life story. His belief in the virtue of humankind is one of his most inspiring character traits, and he prepared this chronicle to honor the valor of the people who risked their lives to save him, whose acts of bravery he finds more noteworthy than his own "brushes with death." The memoir upholds that appreciation, and Kochanowsky's voice and vision feel authentic.

Quotes from literary greats including Aeschylus, Milton, and Wilde begin each chapter and echo their themes, including the lasting impacts of childhood, exile, mankind's brutality, and the life-sustaining power of dreams and imagination. Using these references to frame his story, Kochanowsky connects them to his own humanity.

Impeccable foreshadowing further intensifies the memoir's acutely drawn drama, as when Kochanowsky writes, "I did not imagine that I should have to face greater difficulties or more dangerous situations than I had already encountered. How wrong I was." The epilogue, a forceful piece written by Vera Kochanowsky, divulges several staggering details about the last years of her father's life. It is a profound culmination.

Lenin, Hitler, and Me is an exceptional account by a man who survived persecution. With a worldwide political climate advancing anti-immigration sentiment and nationalist fervor, this memoir is invaluable.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (February 27, 2017)

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