ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Nowolipie Street
Józef Hen
Krystyna Boron, translator
DL Books
978-0-9851045-0-4
Five Stars (out of Five)

Nowolipie Street, a fantastic memoir of how one young Polish man's life was changed forever by the horrific events of World War II, will deeply impact its readers. The author begins by tracing memories of his childhood, the early years of his education, and the years leading up to the Second World War. He then recounts his family's heart-wrenching experiences.

The horrors of war are dramatically highlighted by Hen's descriptions of the simple beauty of Polish urban daily life during the '20s and '30s. However, the author does not merely speak in generalities. Hen uses a generous smattering of anecdotes to give readers a glimpse into the life of his family. For instance, he writes, "When I was very young, the rhythm of life in our courtyard was determined by holidays. Later, in the thirties, more and more families surreptitiously began avoiding the tradition, and many forms of religious life disappeared." In this way, Hen skillfully shows the reader the life of the average Jewish Pole during this time in history through the lens of his specific experience.

The author's style is quiet and nostalgic. He effectively portrays the innocence of a Jewish Polish boy's pre-war world and the drama of a child's universe through charming descriptions of episodes of daily life. For instance, he tells of a play during which he was so taken by the stage set that he forgot to play his part and, instead, stood stock-still, amazed, in front of a surprised audience. He writes, "Eventually, I was jostled off the stage. Mother blushed for the shame of it all, and Mr. Director gave me a talking-to. I know I cried after that, defeated again. Life could be unbearable sometimes." The emotion and pettiness of this story and others against the backdrop of the actual events that followed, highlights the tragedies Hen describes.

The author also effectively utilizes foreshadowing throughout his story. Dark premonitions scattered throughout pleasant scenes provide premonitions of the horrors to come and draw the reader into the emotion of the memoir. For instance, Hen describes his family's dearly beloved vacation villa and the custodian, Józef, who cared for it. But he concludes the

tale on a dark note, describing the family's decision to sell their villa and noting, "Apparently, Józef was taken to Auschwitz, from which he never returned."

Hen, the author of several other books and short stories and a Jewish survivor of World War II, has written a striking memoir. He brings together his artistic prowess and personal experience in this beautiful volume. *Nowolipie Street* is valuable as a historical account, and as a rich example of the genre.

Emily Adams