ForeWord Reviews

BIOGRAPHY

The Accidental Anarchist
Bryna Kranzler
Crosswalk Press
978-0-9845563-0-4
(October 2010)

At thirteen, Jacob Marateck left his home in a small Polish village to seek adventure in Warsaw. At twenty-one, he was conscripted into the Russian army just in time for the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, and over the next few years joined the revolutionaries who worked to overthrow the Czar, was sentenced to death three times, and escaped with Warsaw's King of Thieves from a Siberian forced labor camp.

Kranzler, Marateck's granddaughter, is a playwright who received the Helen Prince Award for Excellence in Dramatic Writing and was a finalist in the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center competition for her play *Do Hermaphrodites Reproduce Only in the Spring?* Her parents, Shimon and Anita Marateck Wincelberg, had previously translated the twenty-eight notebooks that made up Marateck's diaries and published the first twelve as *The Samurai of Vishigrod.* After her father passed away, Kranzler inherited the job of editing and publishing the rest of her grandfather's diaries.

The Accidental Anarchist is told from Jacob's point of view, and his dry wit is evident throughout, leaving the reader with a sense of optimism even amid war, starvation, and imprisonment. "The seemingly minor decision I made to end my education before the age of thirteen set me on a path from which each subsequent choice flowed logically from the previous foolish one," Marateck wrote. As a Jewish man in a notoriously anti-Semitic army, he went from fighting with his fellow soldiers to fighting an impossible war against the Japanese in China. Twice he was sentenced to death: once for punching a superior, and once for falling asleep on guard duty. Twice he was surprised to find the sentences overturned. After surviving freezing nights, endless marches without food, and gun battles, he returned to Warsaw to join the revolutionaries, only to be arrested and sentenced to death again. At the last minute he received a reprieve and was shipped instead to a Siberian labor camp. Through all of these adventures, despite being surrounded by death, Marateck's wit, intelligence, and optimism carried him through.

Readers interested in European or Jewish history, war stories, and just plain action

adventure will enjoy this book. Kranzler's editing creates a smooth style with a quick pace while retaining her grandfather's unique voice and perspective. *The Accidental Anarchist* is the true story of a likable hero on an epic journey.

Christine Canfield