ForeWord Reviews
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

The Crowned White Eagle: My Polish Legacy
Anthony P. Kowalski
Xlibris
978-1-4691-6890-6
Five Stars (out of Five)

Anthony P. Kowalski's *The Crowned White Eagle: My Polish Legacy* evokes the memories, beliefs, experiences, and emotions of generations of Americans of Polish origin and descent. His son-of-an-immigrant's tale should touch the heart and soul not only of Kowalski's fellow Polish Americans, but also of anyone whose parents or grandparents came to America from "the old country."

Raised in the 1940s in a neighborhood of Trenton, New Jersey, where the stores and churches bore names that would have seemed right at home in Warsaw, it is no wonder that Kowalski's "love affair with the Polish people," as he writes, became the consuming fire of his life. From his decision to study the language and culture of his ancestral homeland in college to his year spent after retirement teaching business to students in the then newly liberated Poland, Kowalski has honored his heritage.

His memoir is rich with moving tales of family members who were resistance fighters and victims of oppression by Nazis and Communists in a savaged land, as well as heartwarming stories of hard-working immigrants struggling to make a better life for their children in a place whose streets they believed were "paved with gold."

Kowalski explores what it means both to be Polish and to be a Polish American. He writes lovingly and sometimes humorously of growing up among his grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors in a very Polish community, and in ways that should evoke similar memories in anyone who was raised in a deeply ethnic environment. That the author took the stories he learned at his mother's knee (and dinner table) and, four decades later, used them to search out his ancestral paternal and maternal villages in Poland is an inspiration for anyone seeking to reconnect with his or her family's roots.

In simple yet elegant prose, Kowalski takes readers on a journey of discovery and exploration that few memoirs manage to do, let alone manage so touchingly. When Kowalski says that "the story of my family is inseparable from the history of the Polish people" he is not

being trite or boastful. He gives his readers ample proof, taking them into the former Gestapo jail where his uncle was tortured ("a brief visit to the depths of hell"), touring with them through the castles of the lords his ancestors served, and bringing them face-to-face with the man the world came to know as Pope John Paul II—a photo in the book shows the author's connection to him.

The Crowned White Eagle: My Polish Legacy maybe a slim volume, but Kowalski has packed more emotion, more history, and more memories into it than others have done in much thicker books. This book is a must-read not just for Polish-Americans but also for anyone who dreams of discovering or reconnecting with their family history.

Mark McLaughlin