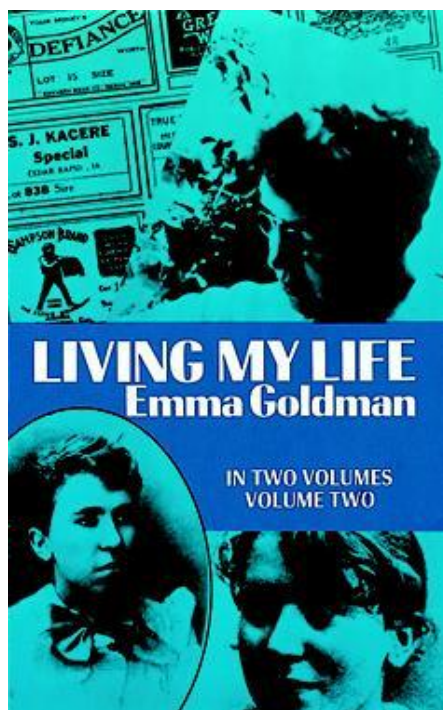




Living My Life, Vol. 2

Emma Goldman

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Living My Life, Vol. 2 Emma Goldman

“You damn bitch of an anarchist, I wish I could get at you. I would tear your heart out and feed it to my dog.” This was one of the less obscene messages received by Emma Goldman (1869-1940), while in jail on suspicion of complicity in the assassination of McKinley. The most notorious woman of her day, she was bitterly hated by millions and equally revered by millions.

The strong feelings she aroused are understandable. She was an alien, a practicing anarchist, a labor agitator, a pacifist in World War 1, an advocate of political violence, a feminist, a proponent of free love and birth control, a communist, a street-fighter for justice — all of which she did with strong intellect and boundless passion. Today, of course, many of the issues that she fought over are just as vital as they were then.

Emma Goldman came from Russia at the age of 17. After an encounter with the sweatshop and an unfortunate marriage, she plunged into the bewildering intellectual and activist chaos that attended American social evolution around the turn of the twentieth century. She knew practically everyone of importance in radical circles. She dominated many areas of the radical movement, lecturing, writing, haranguing, and publishing to awaken the world to her ideas. After World War I she was deported to Russia, where she soon discovered that anarchists were no better liked than in America, despite Lenin’s first gesture of welcome. She escaped with her life but never was allowed to return to the United States.

Emma Goldman was a devastatingly honest woman, who spared herself as little as she spared anyone else. From her account the reader can gain insight into a curious personality type of recurrent interest: a woman who devoted her life to eliminating suffering, yet could make a bomb or assist in staging an assassination. Equally interesting are her comments on other radicals of the period, such as Kropotkin, Berkman, Mooney, Lenin, Trotsky, Haywood, Most, the Haymarket martyrs, and many others. Her autobiography, written with vigor, ranks among the finest in the English language.

Living My Life, Vol. 2 Details

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From Reader Review Living My Life, Vol. 2 for online ebook

Natalie says

Simply fascinating.

The bulk of this volume deals with Emma's deportation and the time she spent in Bolshevik Russia. I've been meaning to study more the history of the Russian Revolution, and beginning that with the memoirs of an anarchist was accidental, but illuminating.

Emma is just so brutally honest in her portrayal of herself. Her romance regarding the Revolution, and her creeping horror at seeing beneath the Soviet veneer, really made an impact on me.

Reading this book, about some of the most dramatic events that have taken place in the last 100 years of human history, has made me reflect a lot. What does revolution mean? How does an anti-authoritarian movement prevent the rise of dictators? Why does it all even matter?

I confess that I finished the book feeling a little gloomy, particularly when Emma described the Soviet slaughter of the town of Kronstadt. Yesterday's Heroes of the Revolution are the next day lying massacred in the streets. And 90 years later, today, it has ceased to matter, and no one remembers. Why do we fight so hard for justice, for peace, for equality? The world has always been so violent, so deadly, so horribly unfair to the vast majority of people. What's the point of even trying?

Goldman spent her whole life ferociously trying to change the hearts and minds of people around her - and her influence seems to have just disappeared with her. Are we all doomed to a similar fate?

Yeah. The book made me feel a little defeatist and depressed. I'll shake it off. But this autobiography has made me think deeply. Now I think I really, really need to read something a bit more hopeful.

Michael says

This is the second part of Emma Goldman's memoirs of life as an anarchist in the early years of the Twentieth Century, and it describes the later, more "mature" (or at least older) segment of her career as a revolutionary. While it is still a thrilling, highly accessible, at times inspiring, read, it also has a somewhat more somber tone, as Emma is increasingly discouraged by what she sees in the world around her and betrayed by people she once believed in.

The volume begins with the death of Voltairine De Cleyre, a fellow rebel and feminist, and describes how Emma became involved with the fight to make information about birth control widely available. She goes on the road, speaking and working side-by-side with her lover, Ben Reitman, who was probably the most important man in her free-loving life to this point. However, the story quickly turns to more significant question of her opposition to the United States' entry in World War One, her arrest and imprisonment for anti-patriotic agitation, and her eventual deportation to the newly founded Soviet Union. This part of the story dominates my memory of this book, because of the extremes that she and Alexander Berkman went to not to see the direction that the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" was taking and her gradual but brutal confrontation with the truth of Soviet society. Here we get descriptions of her interactions with the important leaders of the Russian Revolution, including Lenin and Trotsky, as well as many of the anarchist enemies of the new State, including Nestor Makhno. She and Berkman slowly come to realize that the "Workers' State"

is as much a sham as any capitalist one, and this section includes fascinating details of the revolutionary period and its developments.

By the end of the book, Emma lives in London, in exile from both the US and USSR, and spends most of her time lecturing about the past. She observes the political activities of the day, but no longer becomes actively involved. It seems a sad ending, but at some level it is also a reflection of the intensity of her youthful life and her need to finally live her life for herself more than her causes as an older woman. Although a great deal of hardship and suffering is described, one never gets the sense that Goldman regrets having lived with the intensity and passion she did. She is simply ready for a rest, and to pass along the torch to a younger generation. This autobiography is the flame of that torch, and no doubt continues to motivate young activists and those determined to wrest as much life as they can out of their time in this world

Jim Angstadt says

This is vol 2, starting on page 504.
Bailed early; just could not get interested.

Shelley says

Not as interesting as Vol. 1, but once I picked it up, I still couldn't put it down. Emma's ability to convey anything in a captivating manner is on display, and a large portion of the book is taken up with her account of Russia in the years following the revolution of 1917. She provides an excellent first hand perspective of the hypocrisy and abuses and their variability across the country which culminates in a scathing critique of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. As such, this book's historical importance cannot be overstated.

Florence says

Emma Goldman,anarchist, had intelligence and bold determination that saved many lives and brought injustices to the surface. Her life was intertwined with that of Sasha Bernhardt, beginning at the Chicago Hay Market tragedy. Sasha, incensed by such injustices, was sentenced to 22 years for an offence legally calling for only seven.

For her many attempts to achieve change, Emma was deported from the USA to Russia under horrific conditions. The truths of what hapened in the Bolshevik revolution, that she once believed in, was far from what she found when she arrived in Russia after the tsarists were removed from power.

The 2nd volume covers her two years in Russia, her struggle to come to grips with the horrific truths, especially in regards to the Kronstadt murders. There was little she could achieve there under the conditions and restrictive communist rules, except the completion of work recording past history for the Russian museum archives.

Her goal was to relate to the world what was really happening in her beloved Russia, though noone wanted to believe it. She did write a book which was published in New York though attempts were made to disguise the truth by cutting it short.

She was aware of Maknov's successes. She met his wife who tried to convince Emma & Sasha to meet with him. Emma soon learned of Maknov's wife's arrest and then murder, but was not in a secure position to meet with Maknov to help continue the struggle.

Tired and devastated, Emma left for England; after mediocer success there, she made several appearances in Canada. (Edmonton and Toronto appeared to be her most successful. One important issue raised by Emma, was corporal punishment in schools.)
Emma finally retired to France to write her memoirs.

Spicy T AKA Mr. Tea says

An incredible finish to nearly a 1000 page memoir of E.G. The most fascinating chapter for me was her discussion of Bolshevik Russia and the destruction of the Revolutionary ideal via the dictatorship under Lenin and Trotsky. I thought it ended rather abruptly unfortunately. I highly recommend this work. Both volumes give a tremendous history of the U.S. and world politics. I <3 Emma Goldman! :)

Zack says

O MY GAWD.

I'm so in love with Emma after reading this book. Such a fascinating book. What a life she led! And she drops so many names of other anarchists and activists that this book will be a great reference for further research. It's 950 pages but it's such a fun page turner. It's not too long.

Carmilla Voiez says

I have to admit to preferring the first volume, when Emma was young and starry eyed and full of positive energy. This volume is sad and written by a woman who begins to feel defeated by the world. That said I love this way of learning history and learned more about the Russian revolution, Lenin and Trotsky than I ever thought I would. If there was a third book I would read it, but sadly this is the end of Emma's autobiography.

Miquixote says

Most of this part is about Goldman's time in Lenin and Trotsky's Russia. Devastating account of that despotic regime. Extremely depressing exposé of the fraud of the Russian Revolution.

I can't figure out why Emma didn't join the Maknovist anarchists. I really wished she did, so sad she didn't...oh, Kronstadt, oh Ukraine, oh Russia! What suffering! So sad!

Artnoose McMoose says

This was my first time reading the second volume of this autobiography. In general, I enjoyed the first volume better, I think because it had more details about her personal life. Romantically, she kind of slows down at this point in her life, although I was cheered that she had an affair with someone much younger than

her when she was in her 50s.

The first and last parts of the book revolve mainly around her lecture tours, which I didn't find very interesting. The central part about her time spent with Sasha in Russia however, were illuminating. Imagine it--- she had a meeting with Lenin! It was surprising that it took her so long to realize that the Bolsheviks were horrible. Maybe it was a different time then, and it took longer for idealistic people to stop believing in something. Also, the part about Nester Makhno's offer (and I won't spoil it here) simply broke my heart.

It made me want to read more about the Kronstadt rebellion.

Kimberly says

someday i will write an alternative history short story i came up with when i read these 2 volumes way back when...
