



Living My Life

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Anarchist, journalist, drama critic, advocate of birth control and free love, Emma Goldman was the most famous—and notorious—woman in the early twentieth century. This abridged version of her two-volume autobiography takes her from her birthplace in czarist Russia to the socialist enclaves of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Against a dramatic backdrop of political argument, show trials, imprisonment, and tempestuous romances, Goldman chronicles the epoch that she helped shape: the reform movements of the Progressive Era, the early years of and later disillusionment with Lenin's Bolshevik experiment, and more. Sounding a call still heard today, **Living My Life** is a riveting account of political ferment and ideological turbulence. First time in Penguin Classics

Condensed to half the length of Goldman's original work, this edition is accessible to those interested in the activist and her extraordinary era

Living My Life Details

Date : Published April 4th 2006 by Penguin Classics (first published 1931)

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Author : Emma Goldman , ?????? ????

Format : Paperback 672 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Feminism, History, Politics, Autobiography, Memoir

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From Reader Review Living My Life for online ebook

Kressel Housman says

I read this when I was transitioning from far left activism to Torah Judaism, and this was the perfect book for it. Emma Goldman was as far left as they come – an anarchist at the dawn of the 20th century – but she was Jewish, and I agree with her grandmother, who said to the warden while bringing her Passover food to eat in prison, “My Chavaleh does more for the poor than the traditional girls.”

You can't help admiring Emma Goldman after reading her autobiography, even if you don't agree with her. She's the quintessential example of an idealistic Jew lured into the Utopian “messianism” of the left.

For me, the main lesson was in the title, “Living My Life.” This two-volume autobiography gives a complete picture of Emma Goldman’s inner feelings and outward actions from her youth till her old age. She never wavered from the cause, and she asserted early on that part of it meant enjoying life, too. When I was a leftist, I hung with a bunch of drifters who talked about “creating a reality” for themselves. Nobody “lived life” with any kind of direction. And so I learned to think about my life from a new perspective. Though I am living a life drastically different than Emma Goldman’s, I’m very glad she gave over the teachings of her life in this intimate autobiography.

Mike Snyder says

This is the story of a woman who lived the fullest possible life. It's just a tragedy that what she dreamed of, what many people of her time dreamed of, was destroyed by the Bolsheviks. She saw the Communist reality in Russia and very quickly understood its demonic statism which she knew, and which it did, lead to disaster. A little long-winded at times, perhaps, but always enthralling for people intrigued by the question of how to change society for the better..

Kate Brennan says

Yep, five stars like I thought. I may not have enjoyed this memoir for lyrical qualities and literary conventions. But, feck lyrics and conventions. Through her memoir, Goldman subtly reminds her reader to keep things in a perspective of sorts (a couple conceptual steps back, if you will). What's more important? Literary conventions or humanitarian ideals? Money and power or love and dignity? I've been moved by many a memoir, but Goldman's holds a special place (right next to Jensen's *A Language Older than Words*) in my heart for a handful of reasons (among others that I'm sure will continue to come to me as I grow older):

1. I learned more about myself by reading this book than I could have done in months of silent retreats and isolated soul searching.
2. Goldman gave me the confidence to believe in and live my ideals, even when facing what might seem like an insurmountable challenge.
3. She gives anarchism a good name--the kind it deserves.

Benediktas says

From modest accounts of her own unbelievably brave stance against the various forms of violence of the (United) State(s) to loving descriptions of hundreds of incredible people which Emma met during her activities, and to testimonies almost too terrible to read of the abominable farce of the Russian revolution, this book swept me off my feet and immensely encouraged me to stand on my own feet at the same time. A personal drama and a rare historic perspective, even if repetitive in style at times, I guess it (re)presents an anarchist life better than any textbook - and that with barely a paragraph on anarchism itself.

Greg says

Ms. Goldman's role in the Kronstadt Rebellion of 1921 is the best reason I can find to recommend this book, and I wish she would have spent more time talking about it and why she supported the rebellion, rather than presuming her readership understood the story in advance.

Other than providing a rare firsthand account of said rebellion, much less from a source unsympathetic to both the Soviet state and the west, I am hesitant to recommend the book.

Goldman was a part of the conspiracy to murder Henry Clay Frick, and played a part in virtually every American leftist movement during her life.

Female suffrage (only arguably "leftist") is the only exception I can think of, and this abstention was willful. In spite of this, I walked away feeling as though she hadn't presented what she felt was right or wrong (maybe this is an anarchist thing?) in any sort of systematic way. It's a fascinating life story, but I read her life story hoping to develop a greater understanding of 20th century history, or at least how she understood human relationships in a systematic sense. What I got sounded like the gossipy version of the "Food, Not Bombs" meeting minutes. Probably interesting for a lot of people, not my bag.

I was put off by her breathy style, and felt this already-condensed book could have been about 100 pages shorter. Most of that would be removing her periodic 3 lines of expressing outrage or orgiastic joy.

If you are less cynical than I you may appreciate this book more.

I don't like memoirs, so take all this with a grain of salt.

Brad says

A month and a half after starting this but it's finished (and I only read the abridged edition). Goldman is a phenomenal writer - easy to digest, simple and direct but soulful with her spirit never broken. Arrest, prison, Soviet Russia - it only fuels her desire for the true revolution.

She uses a phrase frequently to describe anarchy. She calls it "the beautiful ideal," something I think is accurate. Anarchy as a philosophy is an ideal, and unlike a lot of people I think idealism is a good thing. But it's also an impossibility, which whether Goldman recognizes or not, she reveals clearly through her life story.

Human nature, as it currently exists, is not capable of civilized anarchism. Goldman never lost faith after the October uprising in Russia and accused Lenin and the Bolsheviks of corrupting the revolution. But there will always be a Lenin (and a subsequent Stalin) who seizes power, who tells the people he will lead them and rebuild, and who fails to establish anything akin to the freedom promised.

Revolutions are doomed to infighting and to suppression. They are far too vulnerable to dictators, to the greedy and power hungry. Radicals, as we are witnessing even in social media groups today, begin to demand ideological purity. They get bungled down in theory and perfection and it becomes a race to who can reach the tip of the wing first before the entire movement collapses in on itself. You only need to look at the reaction of anarchists to Goldman's denunciation of the Bolsheviks to see how people will only hear what they want to hear, even the so-called enlightened revolutionaries.

Through reading Goldman we learn that in her heart she is right, but in practice we will always be chasing "the beautiful ideal."

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Living My Life, Emma Goldman

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Cassandra Lê says

As to killing rulers, it depends entirely on the position of the ruler. If it is the Russian tsar, I most certainly believe in dispatching him to where he belongs. If the ruler is as ineffectual as an American president, it is hardly worth the effort. There are, however, some potentates I would kill by any and all means at my disposal. They are Ignorance, Superstition, and Bigotry — the most sinister and tyrannical rulers on earth.

Confession time : I never got the chance to finish this book and I think I am around 50% through. If this book has been 300 pages, I think I would have rated it 5 stars, because it does get a little bit repetitive after a while. However, I love this woman's ideology, her anarchism, her independence, her feminism, her intelligence, her hard work, her ethics, her romantic adventures, her taste in literature and art, and I felt like if I had been living in Russia during her time, I would have been thrilled to have her as a friend. She is quite badass, and here are some of my favorite true stories from her biographies:

Anecdote #1 : She read banned books as a teenager, enjoyed the political nihilist movement and resented the political oppression of the Tsar. She adored Vera from Chernyshevsky's *What is to Be Done?* and she was sympathetic with the student's revolution against Russian monarchy.

Anecdote #2 : She was kicked out of her house at the age of 17 by her oppressive father, who don't believe that women should be educated. Enraged, and armed with only a sewing kit, she left home and find a job to survive on her own.

Anecdote #3 : She is a champion of the working class and women's movement. Even poor, she did not fail

to educate herself by reading various works. I particularly enjoy to see brief mentions of James Joyce, Friedrich Nietzsche, and she even practiced medicine in Austria and studied as a nurse during her worst time in Blackwell's prison. She also conversed and knew many prominent anarchists, including Johann Most, Alexander Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Max Baginski, Lillian Harman, Eugene V. Debs, and many more. She was close to even meet Oscar Wilde once. I swear, it seems she know almost every anarchists in New York.

Anecdote #4 : She participated in a plot to smuggle an anarchist out of prison cell in New York and her friends tried to dig a tunnel lead to the prison building. Another woman, who is her friend and an anarchist as well, played piano day and night to mask out the noise of the digging.

Anecdote #5: She had gone to Russia, saw the Communists movement, first welcoming the liberation from the inequality of the capitalists, but was wise enough to recognize the downfall of the Communist repression in Russia and called out their horrid dictatorship.

In conclusion, Emma Goldman is badass. She got caught by police multiple time for expressing herself as an anarchist but that never stopped her from going to conventions all over American, even went to England, was an advocate of birth control (frown upon at the time), a prominent atheist, anti-war even before it was cool to be anti-war, and a supporter of free love. She is way ahead of her time, and I think it's proper to laud her for the credits she and Debs contributed to the socialist movement that allow the benefits Americans have today such as 8 hour work day and better working conditions, though they are hated during their time for rallying against the capitalists.

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Rachele says

This book was amazing. I never thought a nearly 2,000 page autobiography of a woman who lived 100 years ago could be so inspiring, funny, poignant, thought-provoking, educational, honest, and sad. Goldman was an incredible writer — the book mixes momentous historical events which she lived through and participated in, and small-scale vignettes about her personal life and relationships to other people. Both are fascinating.

As a social justice activist, it's was also riveting to read a firsthand account of how much, and how little, has changed since Goldman was fighting for a more just and humane society a century ago. The book is STRONGLY recommended for serious readers and modern-day radicals.

¡Si se puede E.G.!

Roxana says

Goldman's autobiography is full of history, romance, horror, and joy. She literally had me laughing out loud. She had a great sense of humor! I definitely recommend this book to everyone- especially all those who are interested in Anarchism, feminism, and history.

Linda says

If you want to read the story of a woman who knew everyone worth knowing, originated every radical idea that's ever flitted through your mind eighty years before you did, loved literature, drinking, clothes, flowers, theater, conversation and parties...well, this is the book for you.

Inspirational and fun.

loafingcactus says

I can hardly address the subject matter, about which I know little - though that itself is a reason to read the book, the subtleties of the thinkers of the era that for better or worse did remake the world are a mystery to many of us today, despite having been well documented.

But aside from that it is an absorbing good read from a woman who did indeed live life.

Matt says

This is a very intriguing, exhaustive autobiography that puts the lie to many of the flippant treatments you read/hear of Emma Goldman elsewhere. She was not some unbalanced romantic trying to compensate for a bad childhood or an inhumane psychotic, but instead a reflective, caring, passionate person who stood up for issues and people that/who were extremely unpopular in her day (and some of them still are). Her ideas were radical and her critiques of capitalist society salient.

Still, it is easy to get lost in this book. There's an endless array of characters, developments, and locations, all of which keep doubling back and changing as time passes. Further, I found myself wishing to hear more of her voice on the various issues, not just a recounting of events and personalities. For that, I've turned to a book of her essays.

In short, this book is a long road to a better understanding of an absolutely vital person in the history of social justice and change.

Homa Sharifmousavi says

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Chilly SavageMelon says

There's a horrible tendency to believe American rebellion started in the late 40's/early 50's with the Beats, psychic reaction to the horrors of the A bomb, the flowering of a socio-economic class called "teenager" and it's beloved rock and roll. People wrote poems at Walden pond, hobos hopped freight trains and there has always been a party in Chinatown, but somehow it doesn't get credit for being as sexy as Elvis to modern minds. Obviously American rebellion goes back much further than this, and if we are less in touch with those angry times that came before, our horrid attention spans and lack of historical presence must be blamed. Emma Goldman lived over a span that could be described as the golden age of American (and European) anarchism, and had to have been, as she was very much at the center of that times creation. A young

immigrant woman, sickened and inspired by the hangings that followed the Haymarket Riots of 1886, Goldman devoted her life to philosophical Anarchism: a challenge to the institutions which mankind allows to limit its very humanity, be they “church”, “law”, “work”, or “love”. Her autobiography is a document to what the immigrant experience was like, what working conditions were at the turn of the century, the role of women in our culture then; and is filled with examples of what “control” will fear and how it will react. Though she never fired a bullet or threw a bomb, she was harassed throughout her career by authorities and the press. After president McKinley was assassinated by an “Anarchist”, ludicrous laws swept the nation forbidding legal assembly and attempted to suppress their rights of suspect non-WASP individuals to express their views. Sound familiar? Emma was considered extremely dangerous, and she was, in the sense that she would not stray from her principles, though there were times when pragmatism overrode dogma. And the horrific questions she wanted answered: can’t we be more “free” than this? can’t we be more human? This first volume follows her through struggles as a seamstress and a nurse, orator and independent publisher, convict, lover of the unloved. It traces her relationships with other Anarchist of the era, both well known and otherwise. It follows her on speaking tours through a younger America and Europe. If it is at times a little tedious in its self-examination and passion, this can only be attributed to a quest for absolute honesty. It is long but thorough, with great titles at the top of every page like “I remarry Kershner and leave him again” or “I shock the pilgrim fathers”. It is an inspiring and fascinating read that requires a commitment that will be rewarded. People fought long and hard for an eight hour work day in this country, the idea of which somehow began to vanish in the eighties. There was a time when technology granted a certain animosity to individuals, even though every effort was being made to suppress and find them. There was a time when “freedom” meant more than a series of economic choices, and humanity was not so tied to income. This is a new century, and a new struggle. We can take clues from the vision of those who came before.

Michelle says

This book not only tells the life story of an incredible human and woman, but also gives fascinating first-hand accounts of several historical events, including the free speech and conscription fights in the US and the first few years of the USSR.

Sanam says

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June Amelia Rose says

One of the greatest autobiographies I've ever read. Emma Goldman had a commitment and a fire about her politics that I've never seen before. She was under threat of illegal imprisonment for most of her life and yet somehow still found her way out of both the United States and the Soviet Union a free woman.

Doni says

It is amazing how this compassionate, vibrant, obstinate woman is able to transport the reader from the transformation of her life from early adulthood to mature adulthood as though we are right there with her through it all. Although I do not necessarily agree with her political views, she gives a unique and valuable perspective both on the bourgeoisie of American Capitalism and on the disappointing realities of Russia's Communist Revolution. A must-read for anyone who wants a better understanding of political change and revolutionary thought.