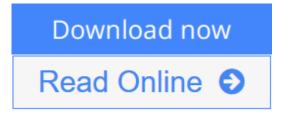


Old Man in a Baseball Cap: A Memoir of World War II

By Fred Rochlin



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Conceived in a storytelling workshop given by Spalding Gray, Old Man In a Baseball Cap is not your typical story of World War II. Rochlin recounts in gritty detail how he--an ordinary young man--was thrust into outrageous circumstances during an extraordinary time. Whether he's bumping up against the army's bigotry because he's Jewish, aiding in the delivery of a baby by cesarean section, being ordered to obliterate a Hungarian village, or parachuting from his plane in the middle of Yugoslavia and then walking 400 kilometers to safety with an amorous guide, Rochlin captures the Intensely powerful experience of a teenager away from home for the first time. Old Man In a Baseball Cap is an astonishingly fresh, candid look at "the last good war." At once naive, candid, and wise, Fred Rochlin's voice is unforgettable.



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Old Man in a Baseball Cap: A Memoir of World War II By Fred Rochlin Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

While the public appears eager for sweeping, heroic histories of the "greatest generation," readers would do themselves a disservice to ignore this ground-level view of WWII written by a member of that generation blessed with superb storytelling skills and a survivor's sense of the absurd. This book version of Rochlin's critically acclaimed one-man show of the same name offers a look at WWII that is by turns horrifying, sobering and hilarious. At times, it reads like Catch-22, except it's not fiction. Rochlin was 19 when he joined the Army Air Corps in 1942. His drill sergeant explained how the army decided that Rochlin would be trained as a navigator: "Look, everybody knows you Hebes are good with numbers, and all a navigator is, is just a fucken flying accountant." His duties turned out to include finding a boyfriend for the colonel in charge of his base in Italy after he himself had rebuffed the colonel's advances. And then there was the combat: on his first mission, billed as "a milk run": his plane was hit, the nose gunner fell out and Rochlin wound up covered in the blood of his roommate and bombardier, whose head was blown off. On one of his last missions, his plane was shot down over Yugoslavia and he had to hike for 30 days back to Italy. Along the way, he was forced by Yugoslav Partisans to execute three Nazis point blank, and contracted VD from his walking partner, a Partisan whose seduction routine consisted of announcing that she didn't want to die a virgin. A retired architect who lives in Los Angeles, Rochlin was 71 when he took a storytelling workshop with Spalding Gray. The well-deserved encouragement he received led him to hone his recollections for the theater. The stories retain their power in book form. Dramatic rights to Disney. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

This simple memoir is not your typical story of World War II. Rochlin has written a collection of brief remembrances that he performs on stage as a one-man show, a monolog of life and death as a navigator on a B-24 bomber in Italy from 1943 to 1945. The eight stories in this short book reveal much about the man and his wartime experiences, from training in Nebraska to bombing missions over Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Rochlin survived 50 missions and made it home, but most of his friends did not. His poignant acknowledgment of their sacrifice and his wonder at his own survival provide a stark glimpse into men at war. Rochlin delivers a baby one day and obliterates a Hungarian village the next. He later parachutes into Yugoslavia and walks more than 400 kilometers to safety, guided by a robust female Yugoslav partisan. His observations of people and events are keen, ribald, and very funny. The book is too short, thoughAjust an appetizer for the rest of Rochlin's tales. Recommended for public libraries. ACol. William D. Bushnell, USMC (ret.), Sebascodegan Island, ME

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From Booklist

Spalding Gray's popular autobiographical monologues have changed the face of performance, inspiring hundreds of other would-be Spaldings to transform their memories into theatrical events. Few of these wanna-bes approach the power and wit of their avatar, but Rochlin is an exception. After taking a storytelling workshop with Gray, Rochlin--at 70, no less--wrote and performed a series of solo shows, recounting his experiences as a flight navigator in World War II. His stories of petty officers, unprepared enlisted men, bombing raids gone wrong, and tiny acts of heroism are fascinating enough. But what makes them quite remarkable is Rochlin's willingness to honestly describe, without resorting, for example, to the protection of Joseph Heller's irony, his thoughts and feelings as he confronted the daily terrors of war. From the beginning, Rochlin's simple prose makes us comfortable, as if we were sitting at a table with an old friend or relative,

someone who had lived a remarkable life and now was ready, after a glass of wine or two, to share a bit of it. *Jack Helbig*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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