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Lorrie Greenhouse Gardella. *The Life and Thought of Louis Lowy: Social Work Through the Holocaust.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011. 240 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-0965-0.

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From Darkness to Light: Finding Life's Purpose in the Shadow of Death

Like a torch in a dark room, a good biography illuminates the unseen corners of the individual's life whose story it tells. It sheds light on once familiar events that history has cast into the shadows and provides new insights even on things that transpired in the relatively recent past. Lorrie Greenhouse Gardella's biography of Louis Lowy admirably meets these standards. Through the use of gripping oral histories and intimate private papers, Gardella paints a vivid portrait of a small corner of the immense canvas of the Holocaust and World War II. It demonstrates how humanity, ingenuity, and imagination can survive even under the most horrific conditions.

Louis Lowy was an extraordinary man who survived an unprecedented horror and made significant contributions to his community and chosen profession. His writings on social work with the aged, in particular, had a major impact on the literature in this field. Like his first professional supervisor, Harold Lewis, whose experiences in India led him to become a social worker, a combination of circumstance and personal qualities influenced the course of Lowy's career. Born in Munich to a middle-class family of mixed Jewish and Catholic background just after World War I, Lowy grew up in Prague, living as a self-described "outsider" who learned to balance multiple identities. He was a German in Czechoslovakia, a secularist in a fairly traditional family, a Jew in a society that was both Christian and becoming more openly anti-Semitic, and a politically aware youth among largely apolitical schoolmates.

Gardella attributes Lowy's lifelong commitment to "cultural self-awareness" to these youthful experiences, his emerging social conscience to his sensitivity to the widespread poverty produced by the Depression of the 1930s, and his appreciation of the universal importance of social welfare to human well-being to the Social Democratic philosophy that provided the conceptual foundation for the Weimar Republic and the opponents of Nazism. These values would be sorely tested after the Nazis took power in 1933 and implemented their genocidal plans.

Most of Gardella's biography of Lowy focuses on his struggle to survive and find meaning during the Holocaust. As a 21-year-old resident of the "model" Terezin ghetto, he grappled with both a rapid decline in living standards and the Nazis' efforts to destroy Jewish culture, identity, and social life. Almost immediately, Lowy exhibited the leadership qualities and persistent optimism that defined his career, guided by what he called the spirit of "creative altruism," which he later described as the historical justification for social work practice. Like Gisela Konopka, another Holocaust survivor who helped shape American social work, Lowy maintained his faith in the democratic potential of groups and the belief "that people can grow and change throughout life in response to their environment" (p. 33).

On a personal level, Lowy's commitment to these beliefs was sorely tested in Terezin. His parents and many friends and acquaintances died there or while they were being transferred to Auschwitz. In the face of this "dance of death," Lowy used educational and cultural activities to sustain, particularly in youth, a belief that there was a future for them, and to develop their sense of self–a quality that was virtually destroyed for him at Auschwitz.

Somehow, Lowy survived his months at Auschwitz and the death march across wide swaths of Central Europe which he endured towards the end of the war. The passages in this section of the book are the most gripping. No matter how many times the story of the Holocaust is told, the personal accounts of those who survived its horrors remain stranger than fiction, even as the courage of survivors astonishes us. Gardella points out how the qualities that enabled Lowy to survive such as "active endurance" were later incorporated into his concept of

social work. For Lowy, this meant "substituting hope for despair, persevering rather than giving up, persisting rather than surrendering in the face of difficult odds, and helping to sustain our clients, our group members, our constituents, and ourselves through mutual support" (p. 67).

Although the end of the war assured the survival of Lowy and the remnants of European Jewry, it by no means guaranteed their well-being or future security. The chapters on Lowy's months in the Deggendorf Displaced Persons Center vividly depict the challenges he faced in creating Jewish self-government; restoring democracy, the rule of law, and the spirit of community; and affirming its permanent freedom and self-determination. He was an advocate, mediator, and "social statesman" with authorities as powerful as General Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe. As before, Lowy used cultural activities to restore a sense of humanity, reestablish the principles of civilized life, and maintain and build people's morale. Gardella argues that these experiences not only shaped Lowy's career trajectory but were hallmarks of his work as a social work educator in the United States.

Lowy arrived in New York in May 1946 and soon settled with his wife in Boston. He enrolled in Boston University in September 1947, completed his B.S. within two years, and earned his Master's degree in social services in May 1951. Within a year he was a field instructor for the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Five years later he joined the faculty of the Boston University School of Social Work, where he remained for the rest of his career, specializing in group work, community organization, and social work with the elderly. For twenty years, beginning in 1964, Lowy made an annual trip to Germany to teach, consult, and conduct research, activities which soon spread throughout Western Europe.

The chapters on Lowy's career in the United States seem somewhat anticlimatic, and are the least interesting parts of the book. After what he survived during the war, how could they be otherwise? In her concluding chapter, Gardella attempts to summarize the principles that guided Lowy's life work–human worth, self-determination and social participation, the importance of mediating between individual and social needs, distributive social justice, intergenerational responsibility, and a belief that people had the potential to grow and learn throughout their lives–principles he derived from a combination of Judaic values, Social Democratic ideology, and personal experience. Yet, while she clearly shows the continuity and consistency within Lowy's philosophy, she falls short in demonstrating his considerable influence on the field of social work and social work education. As a result, the book is ultimately far more valuable as an account of Lowy's remarkable life and the evolution of his ideas than as a reflection on their impact on the social work profession.

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