



# Last Dance at the Hotel Kempinski: Creating a Life in the Shadow of History

*Robin Hirsch*

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Robin Hirsch was born in London during the Blitz, to German Jews who had escaped Hitler. Coming of age in postwar England with German-speaking parents, he learned very quickly the ironies of survival - his best friend at school, an English Jew, at the age of six called him a Nazi. In these memoirs, which span more than fifty years and which shift from Berlin to Brooklyn, from Amsterdam to Buenos Aires, from Shanghai to West Virginia, from Jerusalem to Beverly Hills, Hirsch wrestles with his ambiguous heritage, assembling the jigsaw puzzle both of his own life and of a larger life which was once whole, but which was deracinated, decimated, and scattered across the globe. As Hirsch taps into the shared consciousness of this far-flung community, he discovers that the violence of the Holocaust can breed in the survivor a myriad of responses - despair, silence, anger, a reciprocal violence, a reverence or an appetite for life, and on occasion, *mirabile dictu*, a sense of humor. With a similar mixture of feelings - and with considerable humor - he conjures up the costume ball at Berlin's Hotel Kempinski, where his parents first met; he relives with an uncle the horrors of Auschwitz and the miracle of his aunt's survival; he submits his infant son to the terrifying ritual of circumcision. The journey across boundaries and generations enables Hirsch to connect with his European past, to achieve a hard-earned measure of peace in the New World, and finally to forgive his parents: What were their lives like before us, what had they given up, what had they lost, what out of the turmoil and the violence and the displacement had they managed to salvage, what, now, in the shadow of this history, did they feel they had accomplished? The answer, *Last Dance* suggests, is found in the indomitable human spirit

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