

An Autobiography of a Nobody

Irene Gough

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Many people think it is a good idea to convey their life stories in print. For some, a written record is a document their families might treasure and learn from for years after they have passed on. But to write about one's life for a mass audience requires more than a good story; it requires the memoirist to be an artful storyteller who can hold the attention of the reader.

In *An Autobiography of a Nobody*, Irene Gough bares the details of her life—many of them trivial, some interesting. One of the defining characteristics of a great storyteller is the ability to know what not to write, and Gough is consistently unable to do this. For example, when she tries to paint the scene at the bar where she meets her second husband, she includes a description of what she ate that night. The food she consumed is of no relevance to her story, and it's just one example of many items that weigh down her autobiography.

Gough's life has had many ups and downs—difficult marriages, domestic abuse, loneliness, and poverty—and her descriptions are honest and often bleak. Through it all she shows herself to be a strong, resilient woman determined to tackle the world head-on while firmly refusing to let people take advantage of her. She works hard and adapts to life changes and crises as they arise. The way she handles adversity is often admirable, especially given some of the tribulations she experiences.

Gough uses her life to reflect on the world today through extreme generalizations. When she describes the simple pleasures she and her siblings experienced as kids, she writes about how sorry she feels “for the children of today who at seven years old want to be dressing and behaving like grown ups...A good percentage cannot even face up to the lives they live and [later] become involved in heavy drinking and drug taking to blot it all out in the name of ‘having a good time!’”

While she is by no means “a nobody,” Gough's life story does not feel extraordinary. Her writing lacks the finesse of a more seasoned author. Her book is laden with unnecessary details and speculations, as well as many errors in grammar and punctuation. Had the story been tightened up and thoroughly edited, it may have been an interesting read for an audience beyond her own family and friends.

LAUREN KRAMER (January 29, 2013)

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