

Blooming in Winter: The Story of a Remarkable Twentieth-Century Woman

Pam Valois

She Writes Press

Softcover \$16.95 (265pp)

978-1-64742-116-8

Blooming in Winter is the biography of a fascinating woman who managed to live her long life to the fullest.

Blooming in Winter, Pam Valois's biography of her vivacious nonagenarian friend, Jacomena "Jackie" Maybeck, celebrates age, wisdom, and the subject herself.

Valois begins the story of Maybeck's life by describing the house in which she and her husband now live, which was designed by iconoclastic Californian architect Bernard Maybeck. Known for his masterpiece, the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, Maybeck designed more than 150 houses, including the one Valois inhabited at 2751 Buena Vista Way, which was first intended for his son, Wallen, and his daughter-in-law, Jacomena.

Valois and her husband got to know Jacomena, aka Jackie, in 1977, when they moved into The Cottage, another of Maybeck's designs. By this time, Jackie was in her seventies. In addition to being their landlord, she had become the keeper of her father-in-law's legacy. She wrote books, chopped wood, gardened (sometimes while wearing a halter top and shorts), made jam, and maintained an active social life throughout her seventies, eighties, and nineties. Valois was inspired by Jackie's zest for life, which changed her way of thinking about aging.

Valois remains in the background as she recounts Maybeck's childhood in Holland, Java, and California, and subsequent experiences as a university student, wife, and mother, following a chronological timeline. The clear narrative is enlivened by discerning details and interesting anecdotes, as of Jackie shooting a rattlesnake as a teenager. Maybeck's lively turns of phrase and acute observations are extracted from her memoir and shared throughout, resulting in a clear sense of her playful personality and her unconventional attitude. Though she had reservations about marriage, she wed her childhood sweetheart. Gaps are filled in, and context is added, through interviews with her twin daughters and those acquainted with her family; fanciful sketches by various family members and Jackie herself; letters, diaries, and newspaper reports of the era; and well-chosen photographs. Valois also adds her personal memories and knowledge of the surroundings to the book.

Architecture is a central theme, and the houses that Bernard Maybeck built serve as an organizing motif. Important events, including a disastrous fire that swept through Northern California, are related to Maybeck's constructions. The houses affected family relations as well, as they were close to one another; Jackie felt her privacy and personal freedom infringed upon, and family members sometimes switched houses. Hand-drawn maps and the addresses of each residence are included, while photographs of them indicate their scenery, as well as a century's worth of fashions, cars, hairstyles, and farming practices.

Although Jackie is not famous outside of Northern California, this biography reveals her to be a woman worth knowing. In contemporary American society, which favors youthfulness, Jackie showed that age is just a number, and that it is never too late to begin something new. She earned a master's degree in her fifties, and continued creating art until her death.

Blooming in Winter is the biography of a fascinating woman who managed to live her long life to the fullest, inspiring others with her vigor even into her ninetieth year.

SUZANNE KAMATA (March 8, 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.