ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Bronx Man
Marty Toohey
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4269-8877-6
Two Stars (out of Five)

Everyone has a story to tell, but not every story is all that interesting to other people. Marty Toohey has labored honestly on this collection of forty-two very short stories and poems, all but three of them relating events or anecdotes from his life. Few could structurally be classified as short stories, as most are musings about his days selling advertising for newspapers and magazines. For Toohey and his family these are of personal value; for most other readers, however, there are only a few snippets of real interest.

There is some charm to be found in a few of Toohey's tales, notably those about his father's experiences as a New York City taxicab driver in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. Sports fans—in particular, Yankees fans—will get a chuckle out of learning which famous ballplayers were big tippers and which were cheapskates. New Yorkers of a certain age may also find that Toohey's description of the Garment District and life in The Bronx triggers memories of their own.

If there were more such stories, Toohey's collection might earn a place on someone's night table. Unfortunately, there are too many "stories" that are not stories at all, where the author is simply recounting the days when he worked in advertising. These are not entertaining or enticing exposés in the class of *Mad Men* or *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Instead, they are ordinary, everyday work experiences not uncommon to anyone who has worked either in sales or, for that matter, in any office. Toohey even admits that "one could say I mismanaged my career for a decade," and then proceeds to show readers just how he did so.

There are several poems scattered throughout the collection, most of which are banal. Golfers, at least, may enjoy a few of them—particularly the one that begins, “I think that I shall always see, / Intimidation in a tree.” There are a few good signature quips scattered throughout the book, such as Toohey’s caution to world leaders: “Don’t fight gentlemen. There’s not enough room in the boat.”

The book includes a group of what are essentially obituaries of a famous singer, songwriter, and big-band leader. It also offers an aside about war and terrorism in Sri Lanka, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Like so much of what is contained in its pages, these are not true short stories. They are editorial pieces, and they seem to come from a different work and writer altogether; they just do not fit, and Toohey offers no explanation to ease the reader into this section.

A few spelling and technical errors pop up here and there, but otherwise the book is fairly clean and well-presented. Toohey’s collection of musings and remembrances are not without merit—there are, in fact, a few high points—but overall, it is the story of a life that might not come across as all that interesting, to those who did not live it.

Mark G. McLaughlin