ForeWord Reviews
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Budgie and Sissy's Adventure: Growing Up in North Missouri
Jane Lowrey-Christian
Xlibris
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Growing up on a farm in the 1930s couldn't have been easy, but Jane Lowrey-Christian (Sissy) and her older brother Bernard (Budgie) had a close and loving family to help them make the best of it. In nine brief stories, Lowrey-Christian paints a vivid picture of farm life, including the work, the fun, and the love that kept it going.

In "Saving Patsy Pig," Sissy and Budgie's father informs them that one of the piglets on their farm is unlikely to survive unless they remove her from the litter. The youngsters talk their dad into letting them raise the runt. Patsy soon grows into a healthy sow, following them around the barnyard like a pet until it's time for her to have a family of her own. In "The Mailbox," Sissy and Budgie are given the grown-up task of walking to the mailbox by themselves. Along the way, they see a blue racer snake and watch as it crosses their path. In the mailbox, they find a mysterious gift of cake and jam. They visit their grandparents who live nearby before returning home. In other stories, readers learn about Budgie and Sissy's cousins, neighbors, country school, and livestock. The family sings songs and listens to the radio in the evenings to pass the time before bed. But Sissy and Budgie aren't always so angelic. In one story, Lowrey-Christian reveals that they and their cousin Helen Jean once snuck into Grandma Ada's cellar and ate a jar of peaches.

The best stories in this collection are the simple ones in which the author focuses on a specific event. In "Sissy and Budgie, Visiting Grandparents," one of the weakest pieces, Lowrey-Christian loses this focus. It is easy for readers to lose their way as the story drifts from one family event to the next and skips through time.

The stories are told in third-person perspective; giving them a distance that will help them appeal to a wider audience, but still, the book will hold the most interest for the author's own relatives, who will relish a look into their family's past. There are too many spelling and punctuation errors, and not enough backstory for a general readership. Additionally, the author too often uses dialogue in place of exposition for scene setting. For example, in "Green Apples,"

Sissy tells her brother, “It will be fun this fall when Uncle Ernest and Aunt Tacia come over to help make apple cider. I suppose Mama and Papa will help to (sic). Do you remember last fall, Budgie, when the hogs got out and ate the apples that were piled up ready for the cider mill the next day?” Such a speech is informative but doesn’t quite sound natural.

Rearranging the stories is also advised, as the generally heartwarming collection ends on a dark note, with the story of poor Goldie, a young family friend who dies after being lost in a blizzard.

In all, Lowrey-Christian demonstrates that selecting a few choice events, describing them with care, and leaving out extraneous details is the best way to tell a story. The stories and the photographs that accompany them will give interested readers a glimpse of a simpler time.

Whitney Hallberg