



Davy the Punk

Bob Bossin

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Deftly organized for maximum enjoyment and insight, this memoir brings to life important times in Jewish Canadian history.

Bob Bossin's memoir about his father, *Davy the Punk*, is an enticing, engrossing, and enchanting read. Bossin's father died when he was ten, so Bossin needed to stretch the structure of his book and create much more than a memoir. It is Jewish genealogy (Bossin's family emigrated from the Ukraine in the late 1880s), it is Canadian history (they settled in the slums of Toronto), and it is a commentary on both Canadian and American social problems (primarily gambling on horse races and bootlegging in the decades prior to World War II).

Since Bossin has direct knowledge of his father for only ten years, he has had to verify many of stories he heard as a child. In the afterword, he details the painstaking research he attempted for years; this section by itself is a superb reminder to memoir writers that the best stories get the facts straight.

Bossin's background as a journalist serves him admirably. His prose is lively, and the memoir has the intrigue of a novel. The title is a reference to his father's alleged association with gangsters. The author's style is folksy, and he often clutches a cliché and squeezes out extra metaphorical meaning: "The streets of the Ward were not paved with gold, but they were paved." Sometimes he uses a common phrase in an uncommon context, giving it new life; Bossin scorns the Volstead Act and comments that it "offered the greatest affirmative action program for criminals ever devised." His proficiency in writing is evident when his father retells one of the more famous jokes about race horses, the saga of Lucky Seven.

The vintage photographs bestow the feeling of nostalgia and are strategically placed throughout the memoir rather than incorporating them all in a separate section. This positioning serves to comment on and strengthen the narrative. Bossin characterizes Senator Estes Kefauver as less than stellar, for instance, and the accompanying photo portrays him as a dolt from Tennessee.

Readers interested in Jewish culture in Canada, the inner workings of gambling on horses, or just a bittersweet yarn of a son admiring his father will relish Bossin's story.

THOMAS H. BRENNAN (Fall 2014)

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