ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Ethel Merman, Mother Teresa ... and Me: My Improbable Journey from Chateaux in France to the Slums of Calcutta, A Memoir

Tony Cointreau
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Tony Cointreau writes of a life and career that took him from the elegance of Park Avenue to the poorest slums on earth. He is, at heart, a showbiz guy, and while his writing may lack literary polish, any reader can detect the seriousness and passion of a man who grew up unloved and abused even within his rarefied world.

So, his connection with these disparate women—Broadway star Ethel Merman and, later, Mother Teresa—illustrates his need for surrogate mothers. We care about this man's life not so much for his own story but for the way he brings two larger--than--life personalities down to our level.

We hear about the private pain of Merman's rocky relationship with her daughter—before the spotlights hit her, and before the public Merman with "a power that could overwhelm and thrill you with its laser--like beam" took shape. And behind Cointreau's descriptions of Mother Teresa's genuine humility, there is also an inquisitiveness about the nature of the poverty and disease against which she fought her entire life. "She also worried about the increase in AIDS cases around the world, and constantly asked me why, for which I had no answer except 'ignorance and drugs.'"

Perpetual "mother" and the ever--seeking "son" are equally baffled about the nature of disease, and the scene is especially powerful for the visual image one gets of two ordinary humans talking.

Howard Lovy