Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

From Hurricane Katrina to the Middle East: A True Love Story
Jo Ann Godfrey
BookSurge
978-1-4392-7065-3
Three Stars (out of Five)

Retired flight attendant and interior designer Jo Ann Godfrey takes readers on a flight through the friendly skies of her life. Her memoir, *From Hurricane Katrina to the Middle East*, tells of Godfrey's travels and search for true love. She describes herself as "a busy interior designer [who] enjoyed helping clients create wellness homes." Briefly, Godfrey fills in her back story: she taught interior decorating, volunteered for nonprofit and business organizations, and was a breast cancer survivor. Then she meets Gary, and the story begins.

Their relationship quickly escalates. A trip to Italy puts to rest her doubts concerning the sixteen year difference in their ages: she is sixty-two; Gary, a youthful forty-six. Their relationship is further tested when Gary must follow his work to Bahrain while Godfrey remains in her beloved New Orleans. It is the year of Katrina and she is at her best when writing about her escape from the city before the storm hits. Traveling alone across Mississippi, she fights the crowded highway, the long lines at the gas pumps, and above all, she keeps at bay the fears that she will never return to her home. As Godfrey leaves New Orleans, it is with the knowledge that her mother in San Francisco is dying. "I was scared for myself and for Mom and wanted to cry and throw up, but I forced all energies on focusing on the tasks," she writes. Godfrey must choose whether to seek refuge with her older sister or to join her younger sister and share caretaking responsibilities for their mother. Godfrey chooses refuge.

The book, simply written, offers a friendly, straightforward description of a woman born in 1942 to a Jewish father "blessed with an insatiable curiosity about people and…an immense wanderlust to see the world," and a Jewish mother devoted to her home and family. These descriptions are as deep as Godfrey gets into the psyche of any of the major players in her life, including herself. Life lessons are included at the end of each chapter, as are sound bites, such as: "Embrace your past. It has made you who you are today and enables you to better determine

your important desires and needs to shape your future."

The memoir is a manicured and carefully coiffed version of a life. Between the lines one can glimpse an aging woman and the choices she makes in an effort to survive. Godfrey demonstrates a knack for bringing exotic locations alive with the details of daily life. Readers will experience New Orleans, a fast trip across Europe, and an expatriate's life in the Middle East. This feel-good memoir offers uplifting life lessons, a sweet love story, and a happy ending. Women who enjoy peeking into a successful, beautiful, financially independent woman's life unmarred by introspection or gritty conflict will enjoy this lightweight excursion.

Dawn Goldsmith