



Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Green Gravy, Monster Bread, and Other Adventures

Alice Breon

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Five Stars (out of Five)

Alice Breon offers a collection of delightful, lighthearted tales about her often ordinary, if oddly fascinating, personal life in *Green Gravy, Monster Bread and Other Adventures*. The title conveys the octogenarian's fine sense of humor and willingness to "tell on herself" in order to share her stories. Breon's disclosures give others the opportunity not only to chuckle along with her, but also to learn more about her generation and the society in which she lived. This volume covers a period of some twenty-five years, starting at the onset of American involvement in World War II, and the author is promising a sequel covering the next forty-five years.

The "green gravy" and the "monster bread" of the title both represent the cooking mistakes of a young wife whose "mother was an excellent cook," but, notes the author, "sadly... did not pass her skills onto her children." Like many of the other household tales Breon recounts, the cooking stories are comical and comfortably familiar, and the very fact that readers can so easily relate to them supplies much of the book's appeal.

Sometimes, however, it is as if she were writing for young children or for people in a future time, as when she states the obvious: "we entered the War Years—four long years of sacrifice, praying, worrying, writing letters," or, "the boys had [their hair] cut short...an extremely short style known as a crew cut." In contrast, each time she expresses how she felt or reacted to a particular event or situation, no matter how mundane, Breon succeeds in striking a chord with the reader. For example, her explanation of the use of a garter belt and stockings is nothing profound, but her tale of walking up the stairs of Chicago's most famous restaurant and snapping a garter, then losing her hose, with the garter still attached, is downright funny.

The "other adventures" of the title detail a variety of not-so-familiar experiences, and their value is often of a richer, deeper sort. Moving through to the late 1950s, she writes of her life as a military wife, living for four years with her husband and children on a base in Japan.

Most endearing are the tales involving Chiyo, a local woman “hired to be a housemaid,” who became “a gentle matriarch, loving friend, guardian, and beloved grandmother.” That Chiyo initially speaks no English is only a minor stumbling block. An adventurous and outgoing woman, Breon always manages to fumble her way through. Her exploits are both humorous and touching. Early post-World War II Japan was a very different country than it is today, and Breon’s tales present an insight into that time and place that few Americans can claim.

Charmingly candid, *Green Gravy, Monster Bread and Other Adventures* offers a straightforward, funny account of one woman’s twenty-five-year journey. Delivered straight from the heart, her anecdotes range from the conventional to the not-quite-so-common. Breon’s readers will want to give her a hug and thank her for sharing.

Cheryl M. Hibbard