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Holes in My Shoes: One Family Survives the Great Depression

Alice Breon
Xlibris (Nov 8, 2012)
Softcover $19.99 (136pp)
978-1-4797-0766-9

Alice Breon, author of *Green Gravy, Monster Bread and Other Adventures*, adds another volume to her memoir with her new offering, *Holes in My Shoes*. This is actually a prequel to *Green Gravy*, in which she discussed her life over the twenty-five years following the start of World War II. *Holes in My Shoes* provides a glimpse into Breon's childhood during the Depression, focusing primarily on her grade school years.

Breon has a casual, upbeat style. Much like a favorite grandmother answering the question, "What was it like when you were a kid, Grandma?" she tells the touching, personal stories that she knows others will want to hear. The tiny details she adds so matter-of-factly inject charm and even a sense of awe, as when she mentions a special, rare treat: a slice of a Baby Ruth bar—one candy bar divided among five family members—and adds, "We never had a whole candy bar for ourselves." Personal stories like these teach more about the era than any textbook.

The author shares some poignant tales and some embarrassing ones. Hair-dressing woes, from a curling-iron disaster resulting from trying to look like Shirley Temple to a head full of broken frizz after an electric permanent treatment, add levity and an amusing familiarity. She stamps the end of each tale with a personal touch, whether a sentence or two explaining what ultimately happened to the characters involved or a dead-pan final remark like, "And perms have improved greatly since the 1930s." A signature trait in her writing, it seems her own distinctive version of, "And they all lived happily ever after."

The text is packed with sketches and photographs that add impact to the stories. Pictures of the author and her family not only put faces with the names but also reflect the feisty, fun-loving child that the anecdotes suggest Breon was. And even more, they illustrate the happiness she describes in her writing. Despite the difficulties of the Depression, "Everyone was in the same situation," she says. "We were happy, loving, and appreciative of little things." It is a message that reverberates throughout the book.

Holes in My Shoes provides an enlightening, easy-to-understand introduction to some of what life was like during the Great Depression. Writing from the perspective of her childhood, Breon deals mainly with the lighter side of the issues families were facing, making her book suitable even for younger readers. Certain hardships are mentioned, but the author does not dwell on them. Her nostalgia for the humanity and happiness she experienced during those years is both obvious and infectious, making even those who did not live through the Depression almost wish they had.

At the very end of the book, there is a very short section entitled "They Also Remember" in which a few other people share their own memories and anecdotes about life in the 1930s. After Breon's tales, these stories seem limited and even colorless, and the entire section feels like an afterthought. The idea itself is fine, but readers will expect more than these last few pages provide. Either significantly expanding this part of the book or eliminating it altogether would make for a better conclusion to an otherwise delightful memoir.

CHERYL HIBBARD (March 12, 2013)

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