



I Punched Myself in the Eye: Stories of Self-Sabotage, Imperfection and Perfect, Amazing Grace

Pamela Capone

CreateSpace (Dec 13, 2015)

Softcover \$15.99 (208pp)

978-1-5191-0210-2

Gentle humor enlivens these short autobiographical essays, charming snapshots of one Christian woman's life.

Composed of a series of biographical short-short essays, *I Punched Myself in the Eye* details the life of a globe-trotting suburbanite through a humorous, faith-based lens.

Pamela Capone, adopted daughter of an Italian American family, uses her Christian beliefs as a guide as she navigates challenges as mundane as a new juicer and as profound as her experience teaching at a school for impoverished Guatemalan girls. She documents her experiences in essays that do not shrink from the imperfections in her life, but often find a way to laugh at them. Ranging from overtly humorous to poignant, each essay in this book functions as a snapshot of the author's life. Trips around the world, especially to Italy and Guatemala, also feature prominently.

The constants amongst these essays are tones of gratitude and humor. In a collection that scrambles over so much ground within one woman's life, these baseline sentiments help both to tie the entire book together and to endear the author to her audience. Subtopics, including Capone's adoption, family life, and faith, all fall into the contexts of humor and gratitude. The book spends a great deal of time expressing appreciation for the author's family and friends. A previous understanding of Christian beliefs is helpful to comprehension of the book's many casual references to Jesus and the Bible.

The variety of essays and lack of organization among or even sometimes within them call to mind an organically developing conversation. The author winks in the direction of this casual and nontraditional structure, calling her chapters "messays."

The very short format can be hit and miss, and a few vignettes could benefit from further development. Several meander and end abruptly, which can be jarring but is not a fatal flaw. These are, after all, snapshots, and not every story has to have a punchline. Seasoned essay readers will be charmed by the author's friendly honesty and the unpretentious way that the book unfolds.

Even when cracking jokes, Capone is gentle, often poking fun at herself for small offenses fed by insensitivity. As the book progresses, the author's personality becomes its primary strength, a situation not unlike a celebrity's or comedian's collection, and the author's experience with stand-up comedy may factor in. Though many vignettes also deal with serious or sad subjects, the majority cast the author's life in a humorous light. The book's editorial style engages with wordplay, including puns, and is at its strongest when delivering jokes.

I Punched Myself in the Eye is a family-oriented book most likely to appeal to Christians. Easily read in a series of short sittings, or in one long one, this collection of short-short essays easily punches above its weight.

ANNA CALL (February 19, 2016)

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