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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

In Spite of Everything... A Life Story of Fear, Heartbreak, Love, Trickery, and Triumph

Pat Coppard
AuthorHouse (Jan 20, 2012)
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In his autobiography *In Spite of Everything: A Life-Story of Fear, Heartbreak, Love, Trickery and Triumph*, Pat Coppard traces his life in England during the early years of World War II. He describes his mother's tragic death, his childhood and tumultuous adolescence under the care of his grandparents, and his transformation into an adult. The book closes as he prepares to serve his mandatory time in the British National Service.

In Spite of Everything is written in an easy-going narrative style. For instance, Coppard directly addresses his audience in the prologue, writing, "Sit back, make yourself comfortable, you're in for a good read." However, his style is a bit too casual at times. For example, in one place he writes, "He had been on leave, would you believe it, in Calcutta." He also occasionally employs slang like "gobbled." Such stylistic choices makes it difficult for readers to perceive Coppard's book as a serious autobiography because the style often seems to simply be the result of sloppy editing rather than deliberate choices meant to affect the readers' perception of Coppard's adventures.

Coppard does not reference specific dates in his story, which makes it difficult for readers to remember that they are reading history rather than fiction, and it undermines the impact of the story. Instead of specific references, Coppard uses vague transitions like "Suddenly, the day had arrived."

On a more positive note, Coppard's references to the tragedies experienced during his early years are powerful and touching. For instance, the scene during which Eileen, Pat's aunt, announces that she has contracted tuberculosis is very sad. Coppard's choice of words like "killer," "numb," and "crushing" enhances the emotional quality of the scene.

Coppard's tale could have been brought more alive with better description and less straightforward narration. Additionally, basic punctuation errors abound. At one point, Coppard writes, "Being Catholics, the down side, was the amount of holy events going on at school." Such errors undermine the professional quality of the work. The inclusion of the author's nickname, "Pat C.," on the title page and the subtitle's inconsistent capitalization ("love, trickery, and Triumph") put the readers on guard from the start.

Overall, *In Spite of Everything* is an interesting, touching tale. Readers will connect with Coppard. Unfortunately, the sloppy editing, awkward style choices, and lack of consistent use of dates undermine the book's ability to stand as a substantial historical document. Nonetheless, the tale of a young man during such a tragic and tumultuous time in history will profoundly affect readers interested in the history of World War II.
EMILY ADAMS (November 7, 2012)

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