

## Misunderstood: Based on a True Story

**Laura Rosek**

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*This novelization of a true story is valuable and memorable for its portrait of a troubled life redeemed.*

Laura Rosek's gritty and readable memoir-cum-novel *Misunderstood* focuses on growing up in the lower tier of Britain's working class.

The central character of the book, billed as a novel "based on" the author's life, is also named Laura, and she is born into a large and less than ideal family. Her mother is chronically depressed, her dad likes his drink, and the factory work available to her father and brothers is mind-numbing as well as physically demanding. Laura has demons of her own, setting her on a path of self-destructive behavior that echoes into her adulthood. The story, unfolding against the backdrop of postwar Britain, chronicles Laura's lifelong struggle to achieve peace and stability in her life.

The first third of the book moves at a turgid pace, devoting too much time to quotidian events while striving to portray Laura as a repressed and bullied victim. She is often referred to as "little Laura" who must bravely fend for herself, yet Laura comes across not as helpless, but as a troubled child given to bouts of explosive rage. She strangles a chicken when it refuses to drink the water she offers it, repays a mild case of bullying by bashing the offender's forehead with an iron bar, and claws the face of a playmate who tries to kiss her. Because the narrative shares Laura's view of herself as an innocent victim, it is sometimes difficult to feel sympathetic. Laura is ten and these behaviors are firmly established when she suffers a trauma that explains her later rage.

The prose gets progressively better as the story moves forward, making for rewarding reading. After the slow opening, the pace accelerates, and the focus sharpens to well-chosen details and events that evoke Laura's world and her coming of age during the Teddy Boy and hippie eras. Laura, by the time she becomes a single mom, is effectively shown as a strong character who works long and hard to make a better life for her daughter. The dialogue also becomes more realistic and well conveys Laura's spunkiness and sense of humor.

The book is unflinchingly forthright in recounting Laura's disastrous choices in men, which largely keep her in the role of victim, but is equally forthright in charting her more successful quest to forgive her parents, make and keep friends, and build a life of peace and stability. Laura's achievements are hard-won but not exaggerated; even in the epilogue, she still has a penchant for blaming others for misunderstanding her, but this is now secondary to her ability to stand on her own.

*Misunderstood* offers a worthwhile view of postwar Britain and is valuable and memorable for its portrait of a troubled life redeemed.

SUSAN WAGGONER (May 16, 2016)

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