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My Turquoise Years: A Memoir

M.A.C. Farrant
Greystone Books (Mar 22, 2004)
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“If 1960 were assigned a color it would be turquoise.” A unique hue of blue-green represents the author’s own Proustian memory trigger in this charming, funny memoir of her formative years growing up in a small Canadian beach town. Turquoise colors Farrant’s teenage landscape, transforming houses, clothes, cars, and even live Easter bunnies from old-fashioned to chic and modern.

Farrant was born in Sydney, Australia and raised in Cordova Bay on Vancouver Island, Canada. Her work has been short-listed for the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, and the VanCity Book Prize, and her stories have been adapted for both radio and television.

The relative innocence and optimism of the early 1960s are captured in the author’s descriptions of the small-town microcosm in which she spent her youth. The adult Farrant understands that important world events were taking place outside this perfectly recreated time capsule, events unheeded by her family and contemporaries, who refused to consider anything beyond familiar shores. Family was everything and no one had a private life: “They moved through life in a posse.”

Farrant playfully evokes the idiosyncratic colors, sounds, and smells of her 1960s experience. Obsessive cleanliness and borderline sterility are described through sensory and comic episodes like gagging on bleach fumes: “Raid was sprayed everywhere like air freshener; we often ate dinner beneath a cloud of it.”

The humorous style of this book serves as an antidote to the obvious pain that Farrant must have felt as a girl abandoned by her mother. She makes light of her mother’s absence to her friends by boasting that the woman may be on her seventh or eighth marriage and proclaiming her “missing and in action.”

Farrant’s narrative voice is a comic blend of authentic teenage astonishment and wry adult humor, avoiding the sentimentalism that memoir can sometimes induce. Serious themes like gender roles are addressed with biting wit. The teenage Farrant is stumped by nonsensical adult behavior; she considers every woman in her neighborhood “a borderline maniac who viewed her home as a luxury hotel for germs and disease-bearing insects.”

This memoir is an entertaining glimpse into Farrant’s adolescence and will certainly resonate with those who experienced the sixties first-hand, but it also has universal appeal, because everybody either is experiencing or has experienced the bewildering revelations of being a teenager.

This warm, charming, humorous story leaves the reader with a sense of optimism characteristic of the era: “In 1960 turquoise was the color leading us into the happy future.”

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