ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

Paris, Moi and the Gang
Frances Gendlin
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Whether fiction or memoir, or a combination of both, Paris, Moi and the Gang offers an entertaining look at the lives of American expatriates in Paris. Throughout the book, the protagonist, Frances Gendlin, indulges in a chatty and informal voice that draws readers into the trivial daily life of a band of quirky characters. She recounts her experiences, lusts, trysts, and friendships in Paris, where she explains, "Everything is an event."

The author, who shares more than just a name with her protagonist, writes, "although most of the events herein happened in some way or another, the truth is that they didn't all happen to me or to my little gang…And I realized that it would be extremely politic not to use real names and to turn us all—cleverly, I hope—into fictionalized characters."

Frances makes her living as a travel writer and has lived for many years in Paris. She ventures frequently into various parts of Paris hunting fodder for her latest assignment, consequently offering useful tidbits to readers. The novel is reminiscent of a travel book format, and the text is juxtaposed with several breakout boxes that include travel information.

With adult children living in the United States, Frances focuses on her search to find love, romance, and sex with support from her "gang." Two aging queens (Klaus and Paul) act as parental figures. Caroline, her sidekick, listens to the gory details of each of her short and sordid affairs. Findlay and Alice, senior members of the gang, came to Paris in their youth and continue to revive the euphoria of victory that followed World War II. Their decline acts as a portent of things to come for others in the group. Ida, with her connections to the embassy, enriches the group's social life. Richard, a shadowy figure, comes and goes, and supplies financial information when requested. Several other friends pop in and out of the text.

While all members of the gang live in relative financial comfort, the author measures their circumstances by their lack of invitations to an Independence Day party. "The American ambassador hosts a garden party to which the crème de la crème are invited," she says. "Being only skim milk, Caroline, Edie, Richard, and I…just ate the definitely okay burgers in rue Princesse at the Café Parisien." Although these characters are longtime residents of Paris, they remain outsiders. Gendlin plays with the fantasy of the expatriate's life and the need for acceptance by the city for which they have abandoned their homeland. Yet there is an

undercurrent of anxiety, of concern that time is running out for the aging main character and her friends. This thread of dread adds depth to an otherwise superficial tale.

The densely written book, which sometimes reads like the diary of a middle-aged Bridget Jones, speaks to the Francophile and the romantic.

Dawn Goldsmith