

Simple Observations: A Humorous Look at the Absurdity of the World around Us

Patrick Dykie

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Patrick Dykie's straightforwardly presented book *Simple Observations* is a humorous work that skips between everyday topics.

The work is randomly organized into parts and subtopics—such as grumpy cats, driving and related obstacles, and rough camping, among other things—with a series of rants and riffs playing on each, and short stories amplifying themes. It moves quickly from subject to subject, seemingly with no rhyme or reason as to what comes next.

Short anecdotes capture uncomfortable and funny experiences from the author's life: his wife's reactions to his ridiculous behavior; proof that cats don't like to have their tails pulled. Dykie is a self-deprecating narrator; occasionally, his teasing falls on other members of his family.

The book is funniest when its observations are relatable. Curmudgeonly Dykie complains his way through his tales, recalling how he handled everyday challenges, like pulling in to the bank drive-thru thinking it was McDonald's, or how his reactions get him into trouble, like being forced to sleep outside in the cold after he angered his wife while camping.

Questions are consistently posed to the audience, as are demands for opinions to be formed. This questioning becomes repetitive and seems to force the audience into agreement with the narrator's opinions as they are stated.

Some tales seem exaggerated, rather than simply observed. Saying a server comes to the table two hundred times to make sure the meal is being enjoyed, Dykie obviously embellishes to drive a point home. These exaggerations add an imaginative and absurd edge to otherwise mundane situations.

Written as if spoken, Dykie mentions how and where he is writing each one of his observations, which makes them even more relatable. Each account ends with a summary of its punchline, though this needlessly diminishes jokes by breaking them down and overexplaining them. Convenient coincidences drive stories—Dykie finds himself in the exact places he was just talking about, from the bank to the beach to a restaurant—and humorous, albeit somewhat forced, scenarios ensue. Each topic follows a similar format, and sections become repetitive.

This is stand-up comedy in written form, a culmination of oftentimes universal thoughts that are given a winking twist. The book is confident about its humor, even when the jokes are perhaps too familiar; the comedy, which would perhaps land better read aloud, can fall flat in this format.

Simple Observations is a ranging, relatable, entertaining, and imaginative collection of anecdotes.

KATIE ASHER (April 27, 2018)

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