



Threads: More Stories from a New York Life

Steven Schrader

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Even if Steven Schrader's slim new memoir didn't partially revolve around events in his family's life in Manhattan's Garment District, *Threads* would still be the perfect title for his fifth book, given the woven nature of the segmented minichapters. A follow-up to *What We Deserved*, parts of the book evoke a time forever lost, when scrappy immigrant New Yorkers built solid businesses in the "rag trade"—in Schrader's father's case, as a reliable, if unspectacular, dress manufacturer—and their sons toyed with college and entry level jobs as junior copywriters and ad men before joining the family enterprise. Schrader manages to work in his father's business only intermittently, later carving out a literary life (notably with Teachers & Writers Collaborative), but one gets the sense from these rich recollections that the ties between father and son, boyhood and adulthood, past and present, are as strong, colorful, and fragile as the fabrics that ran through the family's fingers.

The author employs a double narrative structure, alternating stories from his boyhood days, teen years, and young adulthood with pieces from later life; people who play important roles show up a few times, though often, as is the case in life, with diminished importance as the years progress. They are missed, regrettably out of reach, or purposely forgotten. Eventually, the two narratives meet and overlap but not before Schrader builds an urgent concern in the reader for how this manchild turned out. Rather than the dizzying confusion such a structure might become in a lesser writer's hands, the back-and-forth form suits this writer, and his story, like a well-fitted garment.

Schrader's stories reach across decades and boroughs, youthful dreams and adult reckonings. Early on, he establishes a palpable yearning for his remembered boyhood, and a wistful, yawning regret for the mistakes of young adulthood. Yet there is also a reassuring sense of a life truly lived. Full circle, the kid does okay. He wins some, loses some—namely people—but gamely turns a gimlet, and often self-deprecatingly funny, eye on it all.

Perhaps by modern memoir standards there is less of the self-analysis and ode to dysfunction readers may have come to expect. Schrader's gifts lean more toward expert storytelling with enough rich interaction, detail, and equivocal outcomes that the reader can surely intuit their effects on the narrator. Brevity, the book's organizing principle, serves Schrader well. Enough said, and so very well.

LISA ROMEO (Summer 2012)

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