

Wanted: Gentleman Bank Robber

Dane Batty

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To call Leslie Ibsen Rogge merely a bank robber is doing him a severe injustice. Throughout a lifetime of masterminding bank robberies, escapes, and evasions, Rogge proves to be a multifaceted genius, a modern day Renaissance Man that is more likeable than Robin Hood. Told with the folksy appeal of small town storyteller, Rogge parlayes the successes and failures of his illustrious criminal career in a plain and modest manner.

The book was rewritten by Rogge's fawning nephew, Dane Batty, who first learned of his uncle's exploits through Rogge's letters to his sister, Jeannie. Fascinated by Uncle Les' story, he contacted him while he was in prison to see if he could publish a book based on the letters. Uncle Les obliged by rewriting the tales in a chronological fashion, which lacked the original élan of the letters. So Batty used a blend of old and new material to make his uncle's criminal history engaging and easy to follow. The book begins with Les and his friend Bo plotting to rob two banks in Baton Rouge. From then on, it's a ride through Les' life avoiding regular jobs and getting captured.

Batty doesn't give deep psychological motivations for Les' behavior. And Les makes no excuses for his actions. He simply discovered what he was good at in life, which just happened to be hot-wiring cars and robbing banks. As with most good conmen, he is charming, funny, and smart. The same personality that comes through in the story led him through many successful bank heists. He had a gun, but never used it. He simply used the manners and dress of a gentleman—along with good planning—and was able to rob banks by himself and prove elusive to police and the FBI. This primer on bank robbing makes the reader not only want to surrender to a life of non-violent crime, but to have Rogge as a mentor.

Traveling the world via cars, boats, planes, and buses, we glimpse a man who enjoys family life, often taking along a lady friend and her children. (The love of his love, Judy, is unaware of his non-traditional career path when they first begin seeing each other.) In between the exciting accounts of heists and escapes, there are brief quiet, sweet moments Rogge enjoys as a family man that help to pace the story.

For fans of true crime, *Wanted: Gentleman Bank Robber* offers another side to a life of crime—a cunning mind that takes pleasure in outwitting the law and means no one any harm. A fun-loving grifter who gets caught a few times, but isn't deterred from a life most people don't have the courage or the intelligence to even dare.

MONICA CARTER (December 20, 2010)

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