

## Was It Worth It?

### Jack Bart

Jack Bart Publishing (Jan 1, 2014)

Softcover \$9.95 (91pp)

978-0-578-14155-8

*Bart shares his tragic love story with candor, inviting sympathy from those with broken hearts.*

Retired teacher Jack Bart debuts with a memoir that focuses on his controversial marriage to a former student. Presented as a love story involving both fortune and tragedy, this brief work invites sympathy from those with broken hearts.

Short chapters present the author's relationship in concise form, though the tale is colored with romantic prose. Clandestine meetings are presented in terms of excitement and delight. The author recounts details (a warm afternoon, the forbidden thrill of champagne) decades later with an air of proud precision.

Moral asides are offered for a readership that is nonetheless encouraged to withhold judgment: he was forty and married; she was sixteen and his student. They knew it would be perceived as wrong. They understood the risks. But, Bart insists, love cannot be helped.

Bart's efforts to persuade readers of this are earnest, and the details he provides from his eventual marriage seem healthy enough. He and his young wife support each other while pursuing career success, and they find themselves flourishing. Yet, at moments, related details seem a little too tailored—all the "sweetness of togetherness," with few other impressions thrown in. This is particularly true of chapters that recount thrilling vacations across the world: cruise ships, exotic beaches, impressive mountains, and passports brimming. A conspicuous amount of information is left unsaid.

Such silence becomes problematic in the book's last few pages, which see Bart's wife leave him unexpectedly. The divorce, we find, is the true catalyst for this record. Bart grapples with the hows and whys. He expresses dismay and questions whether a gambler's support group may have led his wife astray. Bart comes across as a man committed to his memories, but bereft before an unplanned future.

The one-sidedness of this account becomes particularly discomfiting near the end. Despite suggestions of forgiveness, there are hints of vengeance—"was I double crossed by an angel? A fallen angel," he laments—which cast a pall on earlier declarations of absolute affection.

The rawness of Bart's feelings is touching, but the implicit silence of his lost partner creates an uncomfortable narrative gap. Leaps taken "for love's sake" clash uncomfortably with complaints of duplicity and promises lost in the "fading mists of eternity."

It is curious that Bart's love story becomes hardest to engage near its end. The high-flying language used to recall the couple's happier years finds itself mired in the still-fresh realities of Bart's divorce. Feelings of inappropriate voyeurism may swell near the end of the book, and Bart's convictions surrounding the penultimate question aren't wholly convincing.

Still, if readers are willing to accept Bart's presentation of his love story as a tragic one, they are likely to be touched by the candor with which he offers it. His pages brim with emotion, and the depth of his feeling is moving. *Was It Worth It?* is a sincere and unflinching peek into a controversial and long-lasting romantic relationship.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September 9, 2014)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*