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This remarkable personal memoir focuses on eight crucial years of McCarthy's life—from ages 13 to 21, from high school in the Seattle area through college at Vassar. Photographs.

How I Grew Details

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From Reader Review How I Grew for online ebook

Chris Gager says

I picked this up at the transfer station and though not a fan of memoir I'll give it a shot starting this evening. Read "The Group" many years ago and saw the so-so movie. Which one was the author? Shirley Knight(Hopkins) I think... MM was born the same year as my father and lost both her parents to a flu epidemic. William Maxwell lost his mother to influenza and wrote about it in "They Came Like Swallows". This one of two girlhood memoirs. Haven't read the other.

Some G'reads reviews call it boring and I can see that but so far it's much preferable to Mary Karr's disguised, dishonest, novelistic "memoirs". The "it's boring" judgement also runs a bit counter to the fact that a prominent 20th century writer is documenting her early years as a reader. To me that's inherently interesting. A very straightforward approach is taken and as far as I'm concerned that's the way to go. Apparently she was acquainted with the Blethen family in 1920's Seattle. These newspaper tycoons bought into some Maine papers about 15 years ago give or take but have since sold out. Interesting to see what existed in Seattle and Minneapolis for a young woman's education. Not much that was of any practical value since women were mostly slated for marriage and reproduction back then. Her literary world was also restricted as far as modernism was concerned. Like me she was interested in finding out about real sex and real people(in books). Unlike me she was a voracious reader even at an early age. I liked to read but wasn't "bookish". So far very little mention of her semi-famous actor brother Kevin.

- Mentions "House OF the Pines" girls boarding school(in SE Mass.)... When my sister went there it was "House IN the Pines". Now defunct I think...

Just finished the account of MM's first "love". A pretty sordid story of male predation on a young girl. Her words are blunt and straightforward. Depressing and yes, factually similar to Mary Karr's own accounts of older male abuse.

Work time demands mean slow reading progress but now I have some time off and will finish this. Now almost up to the Vassar years and still very straightforward, including the account of another sexually flat affair for the teenaged MM with a local artist. Reminiscent of "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie". More male sexual exploitation of a young girl. MM seems very detached in her account. No doubt the absence of parents contributed to her plight. She was sort of on her own there.

Once again I appreciate the effort to be objective and observant of the the author's own emotional and intellectual development. Edward St. Aubyn wrote his Patrick Melrose novels as fiction though based on his own life. Mary Karr's cooked up stories of her own life are full inauthenticity, particularly including dialogue the author could not possibly have accurately remembered. If those conversations even took place at all. Phony, phony, phony...

We're finally at Vassar and MM has met and miraculously re-met her first husband to be(an actor). The picture of him in the book shows a man of about 30 looking like 45. Through him she mentions(and presumably met) then-unknown actors Sig Rumann and Eduardo Cianelli, both of whom became well-used character actors in Hollywood later on. Sig was the original Sgt. Schultz(?) in the film "Stalag 17". She mentions(looking forward) her "group" of friends she acquires by senior year, most of whom are Manhattan socialites. From that came her most famous book "The Group". One more night...

And done now with a disappointingly abrupt account of the Vassar years. Still interesting to see what books

read we had in common. Not many as it turns out. So much of late 19th/early 20th century fiction is lost in the dust of history now. A few more Hollywood names dropped: Lloyd Nolan and Richard Whorf. At the end is nice listing of many of the names with some brief bios. Final verdict: OK but not really involving. Maybe she wrote it for the dough. 3.25*

Kevin says

"...I, too, the product of a Vassar education, am now brittle, smart, and a little empty. And oblivious of it." McCarthy is so scrupulous about her memories that she will often interrupt herself while recording a story to let the reader know what further information she has recovered in the process of trying to recall the story. The results can be unintentionally hilarious, or just embarrassing (OMG, so much keeping track of who is, and how much, Jewish), but everyone who is not a woman should be required to read chapter 3, where she describes losing her virginity.

John says

A bent book. Mary is no role model.

L says

I couldn't BELIEVE how boring this was.

James says

(Loved the parts about Vassar:)

Rick says

This is the second volume of memoirs that Mary McCarthy wrote later in her life. This volume primarily covers her high school years in Seattle and her 4 years at Vassar. The book culminates in her first marriage and move to NYC.

McCarthy candidly admits that much of what she is writing about are really only later day remembrances of her youth and may not be entirely accurate. With that being said McCarthy is not afraid to reveal details about her life that do not portray her in a flattering light. Her account of how she lost her virginity at the age of 15 is memorable and acerbically honest. This second volume was better than the first and I look forward to finishing the third volume soon.

Sylvia Valevicius says

Highly detailed...did I say highly? of a certain era, 1920's and '30's and of a socio-economic educational class -of high standards.

I found it interesting as a(part)memoir. I know that I could not get away with this style of 'stream-of-consciousness' writing. McCarthy, no doubt, is highly intellectual, and at times morally vacant, but expresses herself with such freedom, a privilege to one in later years who has established herself as a serious writer; her literary reputation affords her that freedom.

Her memory is exceptional as she names a great number of her classmates from private schools,(rarely anyone I'd heard of) and teachers that were part of her formative years through secondary, and postsecondary school. A bit of a 'who's who' of her times.

I did admire her as an energetic, enthusiastic reader, and a student of classics, art, literature, theatre, etc. Her thirst for knowledge is authentic, and admirable.

In this book, her life is a bit of a mess with men. She claims to have lost her virginity three times, and at 21 married a man nine years older that she did not love. Plenty of gossip - high-brow and esoteric style.

Given that I am writing a part-memoir, myself, I liked it!
