



# BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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Memoirs are a very seductive genre. They allow a reader to temporarily abandon the routines of daily life for the arguably more fascinating trials, travels and tribulations of the author's. There is often a lot to be learned from the way someone else has approached a problem or lived through a difficult time. These books are snapshots of specific times and places, and depending on the author's point of view, strike notes in a range from humorous to cynical. Some readers shy away from non fiction fearing it will be dry, but the selection reviewed here will convert any skeptics.

'Panther Soup – Travels through Europe in War and Peace' by John Gimlette is part travelogue, part personalized military history and all heart. The author tells the story of a journey in 2004 undertaken with Putnam Flint. Flint was a member of a tank destroyer battalion called the Panthers, who operated in Europe at the close of WWII. Gimlette recognized that tracking Flint's unit's "inverted J" odyssey from Marseille, France to Innsbruck, Austria offered a unique chance to explore both the recollections and post war lives of the veterans and civilians in the path of the Allied juggernaut.

Both Gimlette and Flint are wry observers of contemporary Europe. The book excels in breathing life into the conflict via multiple interviews conducted on their journey, and observations of the changes that have occurred. It is a remarkable window into the intricacies of the continent in war and peace. There are now an estimated 3.2 million WWII veterans in the US, dying at a rate of thousands per month, putting some urgency into telling their stories. This is an invaluable, deeply personal contribution to understanding the Europe that emerged from the devastation of this war.

'The Saucier's Apprentice' by local author Bob Spitz is a completely different perspective on travels in Europe. He spent three and a half months attending various cooking schools in France and Italy, tackling the challenges of cooking. He also apprenticed in several restaurants. An accomplished home cook before he set out, he is well equipped to critique both the amateurs and somewhat obnoxious personalities that populate the culinary landscape. Fortunately the majority of the teachers he spends time with are charming and talented. He has a wicked sense of humor about the foibles of some of his fellow students and more importantly about himself. The book has the bonus of user friendly, delicious recipes that have been road tested. There are times when you tire of his fraught love life, but when he sticks to



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describing the frenetic pace of the restaurant kitchens where he understudied or the joy of creating the perfect dish his book really delivers.

'From Harvey River' by Lorna Goodison is a tale of Jamaica – part family history and part elegy for a lifestyle that has disappeared. The author's family is a classic example of the mixed race heritage of so many of the islanders. Irish, English, African, Indian all merge in the strands of the family tree. She weaves the thread of her family's story beginning with slavery on the sugar plantations and continuing through the generations to Kingston in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author is a poet and her lyrical language is the perfect vehicle for the lilting patois that is the voice of her ancestors. Her descriptions are so exacting you can almost smell the frangipani blossoms. This is the story of the power of strong family roots, the bravery of people who must start over in order to prosper and the wonderful memories of Eden like beginnings – in this case the Harvey River. The river sustains the family in many ways, especially when their lives are far removed from its peace and beauty.

'Here if You Need Me' is Kate Braestrup's brave account of picking up the pieces of her life after the death of her husband. Alone with four children, she decides to get a divinity degree and ends up with the job of chaplain to the Maine Warden Service. The book is a testimonial to the power of faith, the importance of family and the courage to head in a completely different direction than you had planned. There are many anecdotes of the dangers the wardens face and the importance of persevering when lives are at stake. On a parallel track she writes with affection about the dailyness of family life, with alternately hilarious and touching observations about everything from juggling work and home to moving through grief with children.

We would be happy to discuss our other favorites with you so drop by the Rowayton Library anytime!

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