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Rosamond Bernier has lived an unusually full life--remarkable for its vividness and diversity of experience--and she has known many (one is tempted to say all) of the greatest artists and composers of the twentieth century.

In *Some of My Lives*, Bernier has made a kind of literary scrapbook from an extraordinary array of writings, ranging from diary entries to her many contributions to the art journal *L'OEIL*, which she cofounded in 1955. The result is a multifaceted self-portrait of a life informed and surrounded by the arts.

Through the stories of her encounters with some of the twentieth century's great artists and composers, including Pablo Picasso, Leonard Bernstein, Max Ernst, Aaron Copeland, Malcolm Lowry, and Karl Lagerfeld, we come to understand the sheer richness of Bernier's experiences, interactions, and memories. The result is pithy, hilarious, and wise--a richly rewarding chronicle of many lives fully lived.

Some of My Lives: A Scrapbook Memoir Details

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Carrie Engerrand says

I read the novel upon meeting her, after a lecture she gave. She is a fascinating lady to read about. I highly recommend this book to anyone. Much more interesting than your average biography.

Amari says

Truly horrible. Boring, self-indulgent, with no sense of what is of interest to the reader. I love the work of so many of the artists included that I've read on longer than I've wanted to, hoping to glean something meaningful about them. However, it's just the Rosamond show, all about proving how wonderful and irresistible the great artists thought she was. Well, I think she should be resisted at all turns. How they managed to put up with her is a mystery.

How can one write in such a shamelessly shallow manner about these luminaries? It is beyond my comprehension.

Sharon says

This is a lovely book. But (and I can't believe I'm about to say this about a book by a distinguished art critic and Vogue editor) I wish it had had firmer editing. While it's obviously designed as a scrapbook, I wish it was a bit more organized, a bit more structured, and more cohesive, showing more of the progression of her life, career, and acquaintances, rather than disjointed chapters about this artist and that musician. The end chapter where she tells the brief story of her husband's life proves out my point that her reminiscences would be all the more powerful with more storytelling and chronology. That being said, Rosamund is such an intelligent, ambitious, and tasteful woman, an example of being a strong feminist woman with feminine glamour. And her writing is strong and bright as well.

Jeff says

Rosamond Bernier knew everyone who was anyone. As the daughter of a well-to-do family in Philadelphia, she grew up surrounded by famous musicians. As a young woman, she became friends with composers and artists. She then got a job for Vogue that sent her to Paris, where she eventually started her own magazine devoted to the arts, and became chums with the likes of Matisse, Picasso, Miro, Giacometti, etc. etc. etc. For those who love to read about the lives of the rich and famous, this is all great fun, but I found Bernier's real insights to be minimal (sum them up as "artists are people too!"), and her ability to turn her life of privilege to her advantage became tiresome after awhile. Moreover, the "scrapbook" style of the book means that events are not told in chronological sequence: we jump back and forth in time, and certain details and anecdotes get repeated over and over. Bernier led a charmed life, and in some ways, this book is charming, too. For me, however, like a chatty guest who enjoys hearing herself talk, this one overstayed its welcome.

Judith says

This book could have been good if someone else had written it. Here we have the story of Rosamond Bernier, who co-founded a literary journal in 1955 in Paris. As such, she met and interacted with some of the most interesting artists of that century: Picasso, Miro, Georges Braque, and not just artists but authors, designers, musicians. These weren't limited to quick meetings, but were close friendships providing intimate knowledge of their family lives. Fascinating stuff, but so boringly told that even the lofty name-droppings can't get the fire started in this book. She needed a co-author or ghost writer and she didn't go that route, assuming that the subject matter would hold up the book. It does not.

Emily says

Great for getting a sense of 20th century artists' personalities. She has a dry sense of humor and when she makes an understatement, it's delightfully shocking.

However, it takes perseverance to keep at it and there's a lot that is annoying about it: especially how much everybody loves her to pieces and gives her everything she asks for and more. Maybe that's just me being bitchy, but hey!

Mary says

Oh to have lived Rosamond Bernier's lives, any or all of them. She knew artists from Frieda Kahlo to Max Ernst. Composers and couturiers willingly sat for interviews. She started her own contemporary art magazine in Paris. I swoon to think of the majesty of it all. To top it off, she was to become a famous art lecturer for the Museum of Modern Art. If only....

Kim says

"I found it very soothing when I had a migraine to use the ocelot as a pillow under my head." p. 33.

This is the point at which I probably should have stopped reading this book, but instead I read the whole thing. This woman's life seems to have been quite interesting and to have intersected with several famous people's lives, particularly artists and composers. Unfortunately for readers, the book is not nearly so interesting as the life it is trying to share. She tries, and she's in her 90s, so there is that, but the scrapbook memoir approach means we get the same information in multiple places, and that the chronology is a bit confusing. Mostly I found the name-dropping overwhelming and a bit pretentious seeming, but I also realize that's just the life she led, I suppose, with Picasso and company making appearances in one's everyday life.

Eva Gerald says

By the third chapter of the book I got the impression that the reason so many fascinating artists kept company with Rosamond Bernier is because not a one of them would be threatened by the possibility that she might be more interesting than they. A very dull book and, at times, a chore to read. I hung in there because every now and then there might be an illuminating sentence about a particular artist, easily found when skimming the text.

Paula says

Rosamond Bernier was born in 1916 and has led a remarkable life, living in Mexico in her 20's, then moving to Paris where she first worked for Vogue and then founded the Art Magazine L'Oeil. When she returned to the U.S. in the mid-1970's she began a career lecturing on the arts which culminated when she retired from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2008 at the age of 92. Her memoir tells the story of artists she came to know along the way. Many of these relationships happened by pure coincidence, when she happened to be at the right place at the right time. That is how she met Aaron Copeland, who became a dear lifelong friend, Malcolm Lowry, Freida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. I particularly enjoyed her stories about Picasso, whose support of L'Oeil contributed in no small part to its success, Matisse, Miro, Leger, Giacometti, and other European early modern artists. Most of the chapters are devoted to a particular artist, the story of their meeting and subsequent interactions. Although there's a lot of name dropping and the memoir has an air of smugness, I found the stories interesting and the book worth reading.

Sketchbook says

Scandalously stupid book from FSG. (Natch).

Tara says

Bland writing. The random pieces on the fascinating people she met were fairly interesting, but it felt more like name dropping versus warm stories told over, say, dinner and drinks (which I suppose I was hoping for).

Jenny McPhee says

Eloise Grows Up: The Charmed Life of the Charming Rosamond Bernier

Like that clever, witty, audacious inhabitant of the Plaza Hotel, the notorious children's book heroine Eloise, Rosamond Bernier acquits herself in every situation, no matter how extraordinary, with a grand measure of aplomb. Zelig style, Bernier cruised through the greater part of the twentieth century hobnobbing with the western hemisphere's best and brightest artists, writers, and composers while building her own successful career as writer, editor, and art curator. Accurately described as "a scrapbook," her memoir is a motley collection of anecdotal snapshots, genteel and tantalizing, of her dear friends and acquaintances, among them

Aaron Copeland, Leonard Bernstein, Malcolm Lowry, Paul and Jane Bowles, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, Henri Matisse, René Clair, Vittorio De Sica, Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, Alberto Giacometti, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Max Ernst, Mary McCarthy, Louise Bourgeois, David Hockney, Jerome Robbins, Janet Flanner, Philip Johnson, Richard Avedon, and Irving Penn.

Bernier was born in 1916 to an English mother and a Jewish American father whose family never forgave him for marrying a non-Jew, and would have little to do with Rosamond. She was brought up in the Philadelphia suburbs as if to the manor born with riding lessons and an English governess to educate her at home. When she was ten, by herself she boarded the Orduna and crossed the Atlantic to England where she would attend The Sherbourne School for Girls, as her mother, who had died two years earlier, had wished. After attending Sarah Lawrence for three years, she married Lew Riley (first husband of three), and moved to Acapulco. Barely five pages into the book the aptness of Bernier's title, *Some of My Lives*, becomes apparent: by the age of twenty she had already lived several lifetimes, and her life had barely begun.

Read the rest of my review at Bookslut:
http://www.bookslut.com/the_bombshell...

Beth says

Bernier has a dry, delicate, almost deadpan style that reminds me of Joan Didion.

When reminiscing about the menagerie of animals she had in Mexico, she writes:

I had one problem animal, a kinkajou. It drank. It was nocturnal and spent its days in the darkened quarters I had provided for the night shift. At the cocktail hour, it would come swinging along the beams above the terrace bar by its long prehensile tail, drop onto the bar, to the dismay of the human customers, and grab a glass. I am not making this up: it would then head for town and find its way to the Seite Mares Bar. I would get an angry telephone call from the bar's owner to please come and get it because it was annoying the customers.

About a local artist:

We found him at work on the beach, an emaciated figure painting at an easel propped in the sand. There was a second easel and a second figure busily painting away: his pet monkey. This was accepted by all as the most natural thing in the world.

The book overall is way too name-droppy and boastful, but her slightly off-center observations about major artists of the twentieth century are unlike anything else I've read.

Hayley Dyer says

I really dislike Rosamond Bernier's writing style - at once it is both choppy and overly wordy. The editor for this book did her no favors - the stories are not quite arranged in chronological order and some facts are told

over and over from story to story - definitely not necessary and definitely annoying. Lastly, Rosamond writes with her nose in the air and the attitude that she shits rainbows. She's the ultimate self-proclaimed "It Girl" and I did not find her to be a likeable woman. That being said, there are some interesting stories in this book. I possess a signed copy if you wish you take it off my hands.
