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The Mighty Franks: A Memoir



Synopsis

A psychologically acute memoir about an unusual Hollywood family by Michael Frank, who "brings Proustian acuity and razor-sharp prose to family dramas as primal, and eccentrically insular, as they come" (The Atlantic). "My feeling for Mike is something out of the ordinary," Michael Frank overhears his aunt telling his mother when he is a boy of eight. "It's stronger than I am. I cannot explain it . . . I love him beyond life itself." With this indelible bit of eavesdropping, we fall into the spellbinding world of The Mighty Franks. The family is uncommonly close: Michael's childless Auntie Hankie and Uncle Irving, glamorous Hollywood screenwriters, are doubly related • Hankie is his father's sister, and Irving is his mother's brother. The two families live near each other in Laurel Canyon. In this strangely intertwined world, even the author's grandmothers who dislike each other share a nearby apartment. Strangest of all is the way Auntie Hankie, with her extravagant personality, comes to bend the wider family to her will. Talented, mercurial, and lavish with her love, she divides Michael from his parents and his two younger brothers as she takes charge of his education, guiding him to the right books to read (Proust, not Zola), the right painters to admire (Matisse, not Pollock), the right architectural styles to embrace (period, not modern or moderne, as she pronounces the word, with palpable disdain). She trains his mind and his eye until that eye begins to see on its own. When this "son" Hankie longs for grows up and begins to turn away from her, her moods darken, and a series of shattering scenes compel Michael to reconstruct both himself and his family narrative as he tries to reconcile the woman he once adored with the troubled figure he discovers her to be. In its portrayal of this fascinating, singularly polarizing figure, the boy in her thrall, and the man that boy becomes, The Mighty Franks will speak to any reader who has ever struggled to find an independent voice amid the turbulence of family life.

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Customer Reviews

Michael Frank has achieved something extraordinary in this poignant and gripping memoir, a personal tale that resonates beyond the limits of one intertwined family. He has touched upon the questions that torment us all, the questions that tug at our essence for which we struggle to find answers. His story, fascinating in its own right, dominated by larger than life characters whose accomplishments elevate them to the realm of the mighty, speaks to a larger truth for which there are no simple answers. Perhaps fittingly for its subjects, the work has a cinematic quality, building in intensity as the plot unfolds, revealing itself in vignettes that build to a climactic finale that raise more questions than it answers.

With a voice as unique and compelling as the story he tells, Michael Frank's memoir is an incredibly moving, evocative and personal piece of literary art. I didn't want it to end.

This book was slow-going for me at first, but then it picked up and the deeper it went into Harriet Frank, Jr.'s completely twisted personality, the more it gripped me. This woman was a study in self-absorption and terror plus an enormous need for power over others and control! And all of these traits were simply abided by her very tolerant husband. I could not get over him! Her adoration of her one nephew (out of three) was definitely pathological and destructive to him, but she could or would not recognize that. Childless herself, she grabbed onto this boy ferociously and way beyond what was normal. She rendered his poor parents almost powerless. She was definitely a force! The

outcome for him is worth reading the book to find out. And she lived to be 100!

It's a beautifully written book, I enjoyed the exquisite language. Parts of the story, especially the beginning chapters, are interesting, even captivating, but about the middle of the book, the whole thing becomes boring and tedious. It's a sad story about a dysfunctional family and if it wasn't for the the fact that it was so well written, I wouldn't have finished the book, it's just too boring and depressing.

I ordered this book at 5 am this morning and finished it at 12:54 pm today. (Yes, I speed read, but that's not why I finished so quickly.) It's extremely difficult to describe subtle mental states and human interactions in this fine-grained way. I think this memoir is a tour-de-force in the exploration of character-forming.

Engrossing. Well written memoir of family dynamics and drama.

an incredibly moving description of a dysfunctional family.

great family story, although I would not have lasted 10 minutes with auntie hankie! the authors choice of words was wonderful, I added so many new words to my vocabulary

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