

perceive as stemming from the harsh realities of northern social and economic change.

A compelling aspect of the book stems from the authors' method itself. They have chosen to report with description rather than by explanation and theory. These latter will have their important role in later analysis. For now, the authors' anecdotes, introducing every chapter, place the readers within the research experience itself, inviting them to reflect on the concerns raised by the Metis women.

The original conversations, open-ended and unstructured, allow the interviewed women to surface their own hopes, concerns, interests and fears. These emerge around, and were later categorized, as (1) the world of development including information on native culture, resources, employment and economics, (2) the salient aspects of the institutions of religion, education, politics and the media, as perceived by the Metis women, (3) the women's world, focussing on marriage, family and personal growth, (4) certain dimensions of the problematic world of northern Saskatchewan Metis people, including alcoholism and drug abuse, and (5) certain cherished aspects of northern living as the "world of the beautiful."

The book is timely. The issues make it so: issues such as the changing familial roles, the question of whether to endure change or influence it, and the role of women in the church. It is timely as well because of the particular method or research-expertise of the authors. Throughout the systematic analysis of the data and the assessment and re-assessment of the categories, one senses the authors' growing admiration and concern for the women interviewed. These women emerge, finally, not so much as the marginalized Metis, but as the subjects of their own experiences, empowered to grapple with change. Wherever there are women and men concerned about the transformation of structures, these will find the fruit of such a method heartening.

In Our Own Words is a book for the general public, as well as a text for educational and academic circles striving to understand issues pertaining to women and to native people.

Margaret Ordway

Three Lives in Mine. Grace Irwin. *Irwin Publishing Co., 1986.*

Writer, former high school classics teacher and Congregational minister, Grace Irwin, was born in 1907, the treasured youngest child in a Victorian Toronto Methodist family. The tone of the surreptitious autobiography is often one of rage and its "first strike" target is, superficially, the 1970s feminist movement. However, before REAL Women rush to celebrate her as a spiritual foremother as they have a superhumanly historicized version of Nellie McClung,¹ they might want to note that the man Miss Irwin idolizes most in this book (her father) was born in 1852. Paradoxically, but not unexpectedly, there are incredibly insensitive sermons on "Motherhood" and "The Family" in these memoirs by a very talented 80 year old woman who was neither coaxed into "companionate marital bliss" in the 1920s, nor launched into the wealthy homogeneous "dream family" of the 1950s and 1960s. Although quite painfully reactionary at times, *Three Lives in Mine* is poignantly fascinating to biographers, and especially to those interested in sensitively charting the psychic shoals encountered by publicly accomplished women. What is delightful about Miss Irwin's male "trinitized" autobiography is that this dutiful daughter and sibling cannot completely suppress her powerful mother and sister, or tuck them away in cozy "help-mate" categories as is so often in other masculinist biography. While Miss Irwin unfairly displaces her fears and intellectual frustrations onto post-war II educational progressives and feminists, it would be naive not to expect that she would chart her own life in the public and deeply sentiment-laden existence of the three men heralded in the title of her book. Her father, her brother, John, and her beloved friend, Harold Kent did provide chivalrous (and shallow) mentorships which lit a few public pathways for Miss Irwin's own ambitions and, of course, left her with inadequate conceptual frameworks to explain what she has achieved (as feminist intellectuals well know). Thus, what lies in wait for Miss Irwin's feminist readers are fascinating and accomplished slices of social and cultural history interrupted by treacherous and chilling emotional and intellectual blindspots. However, the tolerant, dedicated reader can sometimes fill in the blanks using "extraneous," puzzled musings that dot this interesting book.

Grace Irwin's childhood was spent under the publicly powerful protection of a modest but successful Victorian paterfamilias, a convention her well-connected, business smart mother, Martha, necessarily continued to stage manage, even after the death of patriarch John Irwin Sr. in

1917 at age 65. Miss Irwin experiences fun, (cautious) experimentation and the notoriously insensitive idealism of youth through her close relationship with her brother John, her senior by ten years. Excerpts from John's letters home during his stint trying to sell The People's Home Library in Lanark County, Ontario and from Brooklyn where he was employed by an insurance firm in the 1920s form one of the breezier, more engaging parts of this difficult, fascinating book. Harold Kent, Baptist minister, architect and self-educated English born man of letters occupies a central place in Miss Irwin's life after 1940. Her 1952 best-selling novel, *Least of All Saints*, the first in the Reverend Andrew Connington trilogy, as well as her editing of Kent's sermons for publication foreshadow her own third career as a Congregational minister after her 1969 retirement as head of the beleaguered Classics department at Humber College in Toronto.

Miss Irwin's reminiscences reveal, of course, the between-Wars disruption in the national manufacture of an indigenous Anglo-Canadian culture centred in Toronto. Her account of her Victorian family suggests a theory for this. Its outlines include the needy, narrow and dark fears of a British lower middle class "respectability," vestiges of pioneer Ontario's intolerance of "weakness," and the relentless pursuit of those sensuous, aesthetic pleasures allowed by the classics of British literature, history and a retrospective education in them (in part through their early marketing from the popular Methodist Church Bookroom). This record also forms a recipe (given in one of the book's Appendices) for maintaining that there is a correct and monumental form of education.

The lack of a "complete," "proper" education proves a profoundly terrifying theme in *Three Lives in Mine*, touching Miss Irwin's formative as well as her later years. There is her father's abbreviated education in poverty-racked Ireland and consolation in his certification as a lay preacher in his Toronto church; her sister Irene's desperate scribbling at her fifteen matriculation examinations while in isolation hospital with scarlet fever and quinsy; Miss Irwin's despair at winning only two Ontario scholarships and her later keen sensitivity to any intellectual slights directed at fellow scholar and authoritative evangelical Christian, Harold Kent.

What of the dynamics within the Irwin family? Well, if her lissomely attractive sister Irene was Jane Austen's sophisticated but cleverly marriageable Elizabeth Bennet, Grace rebels at the idea of submitting to any dowdy, intellectually patronizing, Mr. Collins as Charlotte Lucas had to. Significantly, it was elder sister Irene who was their

mother's early, close confidante, and with Irene Clarke's death one suspects that some fascinating details of the inner workings of their mother's Victorian Canadian "hearth and home" died too. However, the brief intrusions of Martha Fortune Irwin and Irene Irwin Clarke into this text are often unsentimental, forming a subversive, fragmented counter-narrative in this book of "self-made men." Irene once said of her clever and elegant youngest sister, "The trouble with you is that you want the innocence of eighteen with the sophistication of forty-five" (p. 232). However, Miss Irwin's innocent sophistication was often the wisely protective frame of mind necessary for that rare, isolated breed,—the young, unmarried career-bound woman of the 1920s, one whose not-so-rare College of Education professor, J.O. Carlisle, was an arrogant (as well as randy) authority figure. In a confidence to her that Irwin viewed as chivalrous, and not pathetically painful and dangerous, this not untypical man of his time wrote: "Oh well, I couldn't even touch a girl unless I liked her a lot; and if I do like her a lot, she's too precious to be touched" (p.46).

Miss Irwin is uncomfortable with the tag religious novelist, and it is true that her fiction doesn't fit this term in the American sense of the word where her work was enthusiastically received in the 1950s and particularly in the American mid-West. But if she is unapologetic about locating her achievements in her father's sentimental Victorianism, and her brother's dreamy interest in Literature, and in Harold Kent's brooding philosophical theology, she should welcome her polished prose being placed beside that of other accomplished Christian novelists such as Mary MacGregor, R.E. Knowles, and Charles Gordon, some of whom were scholarly, ordained ministers like Miss Irwin.

What more should be written here about the memoirs of a proud, privileged and openly accomplished woman? That they should be read and cleverly so, but without reaching for complacent brickbats or pinioning psychologies as Miss Irwin requests. Also, I would like to reveal where I was moved, to tears or relief, at certain points in Miss Irwin's difficult, significant book: In those few places where she slips into descriptions of the pleasures life has afforded her, but without producing a high-minded apology, or, when she writes about Loon Echo (not enough), the Haliburton retreat where she wrote her books and absorbed the crisply sensual play of Canadian summers, and when she reveals that it was her acerbic, elocution-minded mother who possessed the magic gift of storytelling. As Martha Fortune Irwin's aged body gives out for the last time she recites gaily/grimly: "What's the matter/

That you're making such a clatter?" (p.216). That is impressive, of course, and so is Miss Irwin.

Anne Hicks

JUMP, Debbie Brill with James Lawton, *Vancouver and Toronto, Douglas and McIntyre, 1986. Pp. 190.*

This book is the autobiographical account of the life of Debbie Brill, Canada's most enduring and best known active female track and field athlete. Brill has been the premier high jumper in Canada for the past two decades beginning with world age class records in the 1968 Olympic year and continuing today with consistent world top ten standing.

The book, *JUMP*, is solid and well written in the colloquial or lay language of active athletes. Further, it is an excellent collection of diverse and well crafted anecdotes that together weave a dense and richly coloured tapestry of an exceptional woman's life.

Brill's account provides a rare inside look at the life of a high performance female athlete. It sparks discussion on such controversial subjects as drugs, training regimentation, professionalism, motherhood and competition, sexuality and even the systematic production-line manner of developing Canadian athletes. Although these themes are not new, the manner in which they interact in the unfolding life of one of Canada's best known (and perhaps, by a different standard, the least known) athletes is a rare and novel exposure. It brings us, the readers, closer to the Debbie Brill that she wants us to see.

JUMP is organized chronologically into thirteen chapters. The first three chronicle her discovery and quick move to the high ground of international sport. The early theme is Brill's difficulty with travelling in a world filled with the pitfalls of media prying and of public performances in front of many thousands of people. Clearly, she was moved too quickly into such an arena without adequate preparation or support. Brill establishes a pattern of questioning who she is and why she competes, but in these first three chapters, there are few answers. Her only moments of control over a life lived on the competitive edge are described as thin slices of time where she was able to feel some contentment and security with her peculiar jumping style. Brill, the author, now a much more secure individual, uses the forum of the written to apologize for some earlier oversights in her treatment of people important to her and further, to take some well-aimed shots at the media, sport organizers and some rather ego-centric athletic personalities.

Chapters four and five chronicle her time away from track and field. She describes the poignant experiences of a year long search for isolation and for precious, healing invisibility. During the year following the Munich Olympics (1972), Brill recuperated. She describes how she feared most "the loss of (her) ability to dream" and how she knew she was healed when she wanted to regain some "sharp sense of (her) body"...the reopening of opportunities to jump! Readed, aware and apprehensive, Brill returned to the competitive arena. By the end of 1975, she was a more dimensional, secure and seasoned individual.

Chapters six through nine are descriptions of her roller-coaster ride to the position as premier high jumper in the world. After "no heighting" (no heighting is when an athlete fails in the first three attempts at her initial height, e.g., the qualifying height, and is not permitted to compete further) at the Montreal Olympics (1976), Brill was labelled as a "choker" and came of age as a person under intense public scrutiny. In 1979, she won the World Cup gold medal and became the athlete favoured to win the 1980 Olympic gold medal. However, the Olympic Boycott of 1980 left Debbie Brill watching the high jump event on television and seeing the gold medal go to an athlete who jumped 1.97 meters, the exact height she had jumped just one week prior to the Olympic Games! At that moment, Brill was the best high jumper in the world but with no place to bring her goals to fruition.

Brill brings these years alive for the reader with vivid descriptions of (a) the joy of competing, moving, being active and capable, (b) the restrictions which wore her down but failed to dull her growing strength, (c) the rhythm of a great athlete caught in the forward moving cycle of sport, and (d) the concentration required to bring 135 pounds of athlete into the most dynamic moment of take-off to then "fly" over the bar. Brill also paints a solemn picture of an athlete watching her gold medal opportunity slide slowly by. After the 1980 season, it was a deeply affected but very determined Brill that moved into 1981.

Chapter ten could easily have been entitled "The Bionic Mom." Brill decided to have a child and continue jumping. Most athletes would have actively sought retirement but Brill gave birth and a scant four and one-half months later, set an indoor world high jump record. Here is Brill's only mention of the women's movement and it is not a particularly favorable one at that.

Chapters eleven through thirteen chronicle her struggles to remain physically sharp and free of injury despite the physiological changes with childbirth, the stress of