



The Memory of All That: George Gershwin, Kay Swift, and My Family's Legacy of Infidelities

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The Memory of All That is Katharine Weber's memoir of her extraordinary family.

Her maternal grandmother, Kay Swift, was known both for her own music (she was the first woman to compose the score to a hit Broadway show, *Fine and Dandy*) and for her ten-year romance with George Gershwin. Their love affair began during Swift's marriage to James Paul Warburg, the multitalented banker and economist who advised (and feuded with) FDR. Weber creates an intriguing and intimate group portrait of the renowned Warburg family, from her great-great-uncle, the eccentric art historian Aby Warburg, whose madness inspired modern theories of iconography, to her great-grandfather Paul M. Warburg, the architect of the Federal Reserve System whose unheeded warnings about the stock-market crash of 1929 made him "the Cassandra of Wall Street."

As she throws new light on her beloved grandmother's life and many amours, Weber also considers the role the psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg played in her family history, along with the ways the Warburg family has been as celebrated for its accomplishments as it has been vilified over the years by countless conspiracy theorists (from Henry Ford to Louis Farrakhan), who labeled Paul Warburg the ringleader of the so-called international Jewish banking conspiracy.

Her mother, Andrea Swift Warburg, married Sidney Kaufman, but their unlikely union, Weber believes, was a direct consequence of George Gershwin's looming presence in the Warburg family. A notorious womanizer, Weber's father was a peripatetic filmmaker who made propaganda and training films for the OSS during World War II before producing the first movie with smells, the regrettable flop that was AromaRama. He was as much an enigma to his daughter as he was to the FBI, which had him under surveillance for more than forty years, and even noted Katharine's birth in a memo to J. Edgar Hoover.

Colorful, evocative, insightful, and very funny, *The Memory of All That* is an enthralling look at a tremendously influential—and highly eccentric—family, as well as a consideration of how their stories, with their myriad layers of truth and fiction, have both provoked and influenced one of our most prodigiously gifted writers.

The Memory of All That: George Gershwin, Kay Swift, and My Family's Legacy of Infidelities Details

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From Reader Review The Memory of All That: George Gershwin, Kay Swift, and My Family's Legacy of Infidelities for online ebook

Gabi Coatsworth says

This is a tough book to classify. Memoir or biography? Both. The first half deals with Katharine Weber's relationship with her elusive yet fame-seeking father, and so may be called a memoir. The second half is more of a biography of her grandmother. So if you've ever wanted to mix and mingle with the high society of the 30's and 40's here's your chance. Katharine Weber's family had connections to many of the rich and famous, and her grandmother, Kay Swift, had a 10-year romance with George Gershwin. Zero Mostel and Zsa Zsa Gabor make cameo appearances. The action takes place from Montana to London, and Prague, and yet the author's grip on people and events is sure, reflecting a huge amount of research. Personally, I preferred the first half of the book, where Ms Weber writes about her own close family and feelings, but as a history of her family it make compulsive reading.

Lesley says

Got this as a free book from Goodreads...and I am glad I did not pay for it.

This book piqued my interest because I have had a fascination with Gershwin's music since a small child and own almost every single recorded song of his including his "Piano Rolls". I am also an old movie and Broadway buff and so the idea that there was someone who had inspired him and was somewhat successful in her own right intrigued me.

I have to say that I was greatly disappointed in the first half (approximately 125 pages) of this work. The author, Katharine Weber, whose grandmother inspired Gershwin and who the Kay in OH KAY was most likely modeled after was a background character during this first part. Her daughter, and the author's mother and also the father was the focus. While it is fine to set up all the people in one's work early on, the amount of space devoted to the failure of a father and as an entertainment man was not necessary in this amount. I would have liked to have known more about the author's "Ganz" as Weber calls her grandmother Kay Swift.

I understand that most of the documentation of what may or may not have transpired between Gershwing and Swift was not kept and that a certain amount of conjecture may need to take place. I would have been fine with ancedotes attributed to people Weber spoke with at various times. I also understand that the author had issues growing up with two persons who obviously did not know how to parent, and the pain described is palpable but not necessary to the extent the author goes on about it.

To sum up, I enjoyed the parts of the book that related the title and what drew me in, but the book could have been better written.

Barb says

This book mainly disappointed me but I found some of the information interesting. The first 122 pages were uninteresting and disjointed. I kept wondering when the author was going to get to Gershwin and why I cared

about her childhood and father. I also thought that Weber “whined” a lot. Poor me that my father wasn’t always around and my mother wasn’t the best, or at least what she wanted her to be. (I would suggest she look at memoirs like The Glass Castle or Angela’s Ashes for people who didn’t have parents with good parenting skills.) And then she also “whined” because there was little inheritance because of her grandmother’s divorce settlement, and hoped that Angela would leave her daughters something even though the communication between her and Angela and Weber’s father was very limited. She even admits to being glad to have the excuse of a new baby to not visit her father when he was dying.

I have always been a big Gershwin fan and I liked reading about him and Kay Swift. I must admit to not knowing about Ms Swift and this book has encouraged me to learn more about her as a composer.

There were many times when Weber made excuses for happening, just not believing it could be so. She had correspondence from her grandmother’s friend but she did not seem to have much more outside information to rely on and then just excerpts from other sources.

I am not sure I would have finished the book if I had not received it as an Early Review. It was disjointed, difficult to follow and with many characters that seemed to have little to do with George Gershwin and/or Kay Swift and if there was a thread of connection it was very tenuous. The few pages on Joseph Swift are an example of stretching why Kay might have done something. At the end of the book, my thought was that I really didn’t care about any of the characters and it had done very little to enrich my life and gave me only a slight bit of information I might find useful.

I rated it 3 stars for the small amount of information on Gershwin and Swift’s musical career.

Sull says

A wild crazy book about an astonishingly dysfunctional family whose members broke all the rules. KW's dad was a minor monster of ego, a truly nightmare father & husband, but her mother wasn't much better, simultaneously timid, overwhelmed & finally semi-neglectful of her only child.

The family history doesn't get better till the author turns her laser-eye on her grandmother's generation. Then things get interesting. Her grandparents were celebrities way before modern celebrity culture was born, both creative movers & shakers who flew high before crashing & burning, leaving friends, lovers & families stumbling in their wake. The author has an axes to grind with her terrible parents, yet her grandmother--equally but differently wacky--is treated tenderly, in memory of the bond between them, when the lonely child needed a hand to hold & her grandmother provided it. A book about circles of love & hate, the tough, inescapable fabric of family.

skein says

What is the proper way to review a memoir? Does the author get points for suffering in new ways, or bringing a new understanding of the old ways of suffering - , or or or -

I'm obsessed with personal history. If you don't have it, make it up. This is what Weber does - except the lies - this is what I understand: we speak our past over and over to try and understand it, not just our past but everyone's, and whatever memory of that coming through is criss-crossed with blotches and lost names, lost dates, that someone else blacked out and mailed to you and now you piece together. Fill in the holes with cobwebs and sawdust.

... in all honesty I might be a terrible person to review this book. My knowledge of popular culture is (ahem) sketchy. I have not seen *The Wizard of Oz*. I've never been to Disneyland. I couldn't recognize a Gershwin tune to save my life.

Maybe that puts me in the rare position of being able to really listen, for once, to the story behind the names.

... Reading this is edging on hallucinatory, or maybe just for me? It's a long shared conversation over tea, when too much disclosure feeds on itself and becomes a living presence in the room -- all that past; the memory of all that. And how do you face the other person in the morning? How do you face yourself?

My mother always said *I don't want to know what you kids do*. She didn't want to be aware (even after the fact) the angel of death passed by her house. It's a reprehensible point of view, in ways - indefensible - but I understand a bit. I want to go back in time and protect thirteen-year-old Katharine, and eight-year-old-Katharine, and Katharine of twenty-odd years. I don't want it to be true. I want everyone to be safe and secure and alive and well-loved and not freaking pretentious jackasses, for fuck's sake.

It doesn't work that way. Life doesn't. Floods eat the springtime. My friends keep being raped. There is nothing good and easy and simple in all the world. Life is a slow disaster and we all grapple about for a set of shoulders to stand on to keep our own head out of the water.

There isn't any simplicity in the past; not in living it and not in remembering it and certainly not in making sense of it. Weber doesn't seek to draw it out and untangle it, I think, as so many memoirists do; she wants to trace the knot and leave it intact. It brought us here.

on a personal note: the thing I dreaded most being true was true. well, shit.

(disclosure: ARC.)

Gail says

I didn't finish this book having read only 93 pages and then gave up in disgust. What started out to be promising didn't come across that way. The author spends way too much time talking about her father who was a louse in both parenting and being a husband. She name drops continuously which get old. Another book bites the dust.

Janie says

I love to read biographies of dysfunctional families, and this is one dysfunctional bunch! The book started out with Katherine Weber's memories with her father and quickly branched out to other members of her family. I have to admit looking up photos of quite a few of the cast of characters and using IMDB.com to look up others. While parts of the book were quite interesting, others seem longed and drawn out.

The pages of her father's FBI files seemed endless, and others just seemed to be edited. But yet parts of the story were wonderful. The "aromarama" anecdote was quite hilarious, and I wonder what her father, Sidney Kaufman, would have thought about the use of smells at Disney World and the lot now. Aromarama, was a

method her father was involved with whereas smells would be paired in key scenes of a movie to add to the viewer experience, for example someone would peel an orange and an orange smell would be piped into the theater. But alas, the results were not what they expected. And I thought this was a new thing!

One more note, I was completely confused at who was who, and the family tree at the front wasn't much help.

All-in-all a pretty interesting read but one where I wish I knew the characters better, since I would have enjoyed it a bit more.

Jill says

I found this book somewhat diverting, but for the most part it was a disappointment for me. I'm not sure if one can totally blame the author - it is marketed as if the main focus is on George Gershwin and Kay Swift, but their affair is not a big part of the book. Moreover, the author - Kay Swift's granddaughter - doesn't really know much about it. I would entitle this book more accurately as: "A Memoir About Me and My Family, Many of Whom Were Rich and Famous and Therefore You Probably Heard of Them So You May Find This Interesting." It is also probably more about her father, Sidney Kaufman, than anyone else, but like many daughters, the author doesn't really know much about him either; she learned a lot of what she reports from requesting his FBI files!

The writing isn't bad, but there is not much insightful or analytical. Nor is there much to be learned about Swift and Gershwin. Most of the story is lost to history; Kay asked Ira Gershwin to destroy all of their pictures and letters in his possession, and she destroyed her own collection as well. The author didn't have significant additional knowledge of her own, especially of Gershwin. A notable exception is what she learned about Gershwin's disease and death from a 2011 report by Mark Leffert. That (very) small section of the book was fascinating.

Less impressive are the liberties taken by the author with the little pieces of information she remembers or reads about. In one instance, she makes the outrageous claim, in contradistinction to much evidence, that Martha Dodd - the daughter of the American Ambassador to Germany in the 1930's and someone with whom the author's father had an affair - became disillusioned with the Third Reich only "when Hitler didn't write or call." Meanwhile, Weber criticizes Ron Chernow who, in his book *The Warburgs*, made some observations about Weber's family (the Warburgs, on her maternal side) that she disputes. But he did base his interpretations on interviews with family members. Her own assertions come from either her impressions formed while she was a child, or her *own* interviews with "rival" family members. (I definitely got a "he said, she said" feel over the dispute).

Evaluation: I'm such a fanatical Gershwin fan, I'll take what I can get. But still, *The Memory Of All That* could also have been called (in addition to the title change I suggest above), *The Memory of A Bit of That*.

Judie says

The Memory of All That was a disappointment though part of the problem might have been my expectation

that it was about George Gershwin and his relationship with the family. I should have read the part of the cover mentioning "My family's legacy of infidelities."

The author's parents were incompetent (to put it very mildly). She spent 78 pages mostly complaining about her father and his infidelities, broken promises, and failures, and many complaining about her mother. Repeatedly. Repititiously.

The most interesting part, to me, was the relationship with between her grandmother, Kay Swift, and George Gershwin and about her grandmother's career. I found the involvement between so many theater people with an unscrupulous psychiatrist surprising. How could he have fooled so many "smart" people?

The author drops a lot of famous names in the book. In most cases, it was unnecessary; in others, I wanted more information. She gives a lot of interesting information about the FBI records on her father but doesn't say enough about the effect of not naming names during the McCarthy era was on specific careers and lives. Nor does she explain why so many of those involved drifted towards Communism in the twenties and thirties.

There is a good story here. This book doesn't tell it.

Jeanne says

I enjoyed this book most when Weber was reflecting on her own personal experiences of being raised in a dysfunctional family and the saving grace of her relationship with her grandmother, Kay Swift. That aspect of the book brought home the fact that people tend to reveal different aspects of themselves in the context of different relationships and experiences. Weber's mother did not enjoy the support that her own daughter found in her relationship with her mother, yet it was a powerful corrective experience for the author. While the more historical account of the family's connection to fame, wealth and popular cultural of the times was interesting, it was devoid of much emotional meaning as all the people being discussed were long gone and the author could only offer conjecture about the significance of many of the historical clues. I was left with a desire to assure the author that her own life was as interesting as those of the family members she found so intimidating.

Carol says

The Memory of All That by Katherine Weber was disappointing. It was really split into two stories.

The first half was about Katherine's childhood and her family and the second half was about the long affair (ten years) that her grandmother, Kay Swift had with George Gershwin.

My main criticism is not about the morality of her relatives, I figure she is just telling what happened, but the lack of editing. There were times that the book just told too much about her family. So much so that it got to be boring. Then something interesting would pop up and later it would go back to being tedious. This book would have really have been improved by an impartial reader cutting out the unnecessary and repetitious parts. I know that the author love coffee, because she told me three times! If the tedious had been edited out this would have been a great book.

Her father was an interesting rascal. He seemed to go out of his way to be a horrible father, like making promises and not keeping them. I really want to tell you more about him, but you might want to discover that for yourself. Her mother pampered as a child never learned to cook and seemed just not to know how to be a mother. I learned some intriguing facts about George Gershwin and would like to read more about him.

Now the tough question, would I recommend this book? Yes, because of Katherine Weber's unusual family and no because it should have left out chunks of boring and repetitious parts.

I received this book from Library Thing and that in no way influenced my review.

Shirley says

Dnf

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

The Memory of All That: George Gershwin, Kay Swift, and My Family's Legacy of Infidelities by Katharine Weber is a family memoir. Weber is the granddaughter of Broadway composer Kay Swift, who was married to banker James Warburg. She had a affair with George Gershwin for ten years. Her mother, Andrea Warburg, married Sidney Kaufman, who was notoriously unfaithful to her. The FBI also kept extensive files on Kaufman. Weber describes her very dysfunctional family, and along the way name-drops a whole host of characters who passed in and out of their lives.

Initially, the title of the book seemed a bit misleading. It really feels like most of the book concerns Weber's parents, especially the poor relationship she had with her father. In fact, I would have to admit that The Memory of All That would have failed the 50 page rule (if you aren't enjoying it by page 50, it is not worth your time) except for I wanted to get to the information about Kay Swift and George Gershwin. I could have done with less disgruntled information about her father. Once she actually gets past her disappointing father and on to other relatives, The Memory of All That does become more interesting.

Although this seems like a negative review, what saves the book from failure is Weber's writing ability. At times Weber is funny, enlightening, informative, and entertaining. Ultimately, all things considered, this is an uneven memoir. A good half of the book details Weber's parents and their failures as parents and in their relationships. If you can get through the first half and onto the rest of her family history and included anecdotes, it becomes more interesting. I can't help but think that this is a memoir that would have benefited from some reorganization in the presentation.

Recommended if you are a Gershwin or Kay Swift fan: <http://shetreadsoftly.blogspot.com/>

Disclosure: I received this novel through the Goodreads First Reads program

John Otto says

Katharine Weber is a good writer and her family has plenty of interesting stories. My problem with the book has more to do with the editing and marketing. The title implies that the book is primarily about George Gershwin and Kay Swift. But the first half is almost all about her dastardly father who would disappear from her family for long periods of time and who she says was a liar, a con man and a serial philanderer. The worst thing is he stopped speaking to her after she told her mother, at his request, that he wanted a divorce. About half way through the book, the focus changes rather abruptly to George Gershwin and his affair with Ms. Weber's grandmother, Kay Swift.

The stories in both halves of the book are interesting, but I puzzled throughout the first half because there was nothing about George Gershwin and Kay Swift.

My other problem with the book is there were numerous typographical errors, which, together with the disjointedness between the two halves, gave the impression of a book that was just thrown together. The book I read I obtained from the publisher through one of Goodreads's giveaways and was a pre-publication copy. The New York Times reviewed the book a few weeks ago, and was generally positive, without mentioning the defects I had problems with, so perhaps they received a later version. Or maybe I just don't know what I'm talking about. Who am I to argue with the New York Times?

Eleni says

This book is proof that gossipy and highbrow are not mutually exclusive terms. I love it when you can immerse yourself in scandal and not come away feeling dirty (hence my addiction to *Downton Abbey*) and this memoir fulfills that for me (an affectionate remembrance of grandma's extramarital affair? Count me in!). Although there are plenty of descriptions of Nick-and-Nora-esque parties (when it comes to the author's grandparents' generation, not so much her own folks), it's not all champagne and caviar, and the sometimes ugly actions of the "beautiful people" in a rarefied world make for fascinating conflict. I admire Weber's honesty, which is unflinching when describing her complicated relationship with her confusing father (a sort of genius grifter type), but just as impressive as she warmly recalls her clever, charming, but self-centered maternal grandmother (whom I sort of imagine as talking like *Auntie Mame* but sounding like Katherine Hepburn). Weber's insight, along with her elegant prose, elevate this above a "listening at the keyhole" voyeuristic thrill; it also works as a number of intertwined psychological profiles. You kind of want your friends (and your therapist) to read it so you can dissect the people involved--and their relationships and neuroses. (How did the author manage to choose such a stable spouse, for example, given her own mess of a withholding dad? Discuss!) I found this book very evocative of times and settings I never got to experience, and it all got me thinking that truth isn't just stranger than fiction--it can be messier, too.
