



The Peas Were Cold: The Columns of Barry Damsky

Barry Damsky

Barry Damsky (May 21, 2014)

Softcover \$19.95 (321pp)

978-0-692-02123-1

Damsky belongs on the shelves of readers who are looking for variety and simplicity in all the little moments that add up to a life.

Like so many cups of coffee with an old friend, Barry Damsky's columns combine the tone and intimacy of friendly conversation with the near disbelief of having "been there and done that." In his collection, *The Peas Were Cold*, Damsky's tone is disarmingly self-deprecating when it needs to be and deeply revealing when least expected.

Damsky's professional life followed a unique path from New York to Los Angeles, where he rubbed elbows with top talent and was always just a few steps from greatness. *The Peas Were Cold* represents a sampling of the column Damsky wrote for the *Boonville Herald* in New York state between 2002 and 2012. The book feels a bit like reading the diary of a dear friend who was somewhere in the shadows while Johnny Carson was at work, was acquainted with Danny Thomas, took acting classes with Mia Farrow's sister, and even had some small part to play in the lives of Sonny and Cher, Dustin Hoffman, and Clint Eastwood. For all of the enviable name-dropping, Damsky isn't bragging. He writes as though he has been the stalwart sidekick to his own optimistic dreams of success and thereby manages to be the hero and the comic relief simultaneously.

Damsky's stories are not all about big names and big times in big cities. Some columns are quieter and more reflective, tending toward sentimentality on his own simple terms. When writing about his son leaving for Air National Guard basic training, Damsky's tone takes on an inward conversation with himself. Keeping his chin up, he writes, as though talking himself through this tough moment in parenting, "knowing that, what you tried teaching him since he was born—to be independent and to, in fact, forge his own way with an emphasis on the noble way—worked. Hallelujah! Right? Still..."

Not every column is a success. There are a few that come close to nonsense as Damsky follows a stream of consciousness. While most of them flow with an addictive rhythm of conversation, there are some that seem a little more coerced into being or perhaps too aggressively edited to fit the space he had in his column.

But there is no denying the footloose Americana and the near parabolic nature of some vignettes, which seem to invite each reader to be all the more present in his/her own life. Damsky belongs in the *Saturday Evening Post* with paintings by Norman Rockwell depicting situations like the one Damsky recalls as "The Great Mouse Removal" of 2006—"no less pride in my heart than he with his trophy, with my successful dispatch of 'Little Louie', or perhaps 'Lil Louise.' Upon re-entering the house, I shouted for my wife to hear 'The conquering hero has returned!' waiting for a thunderous response."

Most of all, Damsky belongs on the shelves of readers who are looking for variety and simplicity in all of the little moments that add up to a life.

SARA BUDZIK (October 14, 2014)

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