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Lillian Boxfish Takes A Walk: A Novel



Synopsis

Fall 2016 Library Journal Editors' Pick
"In my reckless and undiscouraged youth," Lillian Boxfish writes, "I worked in a walnut-paneled office thirteen floors above West Thirty-Fifth Street." She took 1930s New York by storm, working her way up writing copy for R.H. Macy's to become the highest paid advertising woman in the country. It was a job that, she says, "in some ways saved my life, and in other ways ruined it." Now it's the last night of 1984 and Lillian, 85 years old but just as sharp and savvy as ever, is on her way to a party. It's chilly enough out for her mink coat and Manhattan is grittier now—her son keeps warning her about a subway vigilante on the prowl—but the quick-tongued poetess has never been one to scare easily. On a walk that takes her over 10 miles around the city, she meets bartenders, bodega clerks, security guards, criminals, children, parents, and parents-to-be, while reviewing a life of excitement and adversity, passion and heartbreak, illuminating all the ways New York has changed and has not. A love letter to city life in all its guts and grandeur, Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk by Kathleen Rooney paints a portrait of a remarkable woman across the canvas of a changing America: from the Jazz Age to the onset of the AIDS epidemic; the Great Depression to the birth of hip-hop. Lillian figures she might as well take her time. For now, after all, the night is still young.

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Macmillan Audio; Unabridged edition (January 17, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1427282374

ISBN-13: 978-1427282378

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.7 x 5.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 203 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,181,672 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #102 in Books > Books on CD > Parenting & Families > Interpersonal Relations #3461 in Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > General #35883 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Women's Fiction > Contemporary Women

Customer Reviews

An Best Book of January 2017: This is a novel about an 85 year-old woman who wends her way to

a party. I may have lost you already, but Kathleen Rooney and her delightful Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk will not. Turns out, Ms. Boxfish is a fascinating woman who has led a fascinating life, the details of which she teases out before bidding adieu to the year 1984. One of the most talented and successful ad women for R.H. Macy's in the 1930s (the character is based on real-life ad woman and author, Margaret Fishback), Ms. Boxfish was once the toast of New York. She reminisces about the time she asked her boss to pay her the same as her less accomplished male counterparts. Seeing as though that's a battle still being fought today, you can guess how that went, but this incident hints at the kind of woman our feisty flâneuse is. You will learn more about Lillian's life as a "Mad Woman" and the one she didn't anticipate as a wife and mother...Her story takes a dark turn or two as well, and you will root for her as she responds with her signature wit and mettle. There are beloved works in the canon of great literature featuring famous walkers (James Joyce's Ulysses and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway immediately come to mind). One of the joys in reading them is the motley cast of characters our heroes and heroines encounter along the way, and Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk is no exception. Whether it's a bartender, a bodega employee, or a group of thugs, Lillian confronts them with the same infectious curiosity, compassion, and pluck. It's a testament to Rooney's writing chops that you'll want to walk with Lillian as she ponders, all the while paying homage to New York in its gritty glory. --Erin Kodicek, The Book Review --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Between author Rooney's story and narrator Xe Sands's craftsmanship, this WALK will sweep listeners off their feet...Through Sands we feel the force of Lillian's personality--with all its drive, wit, and grace--as well as the counterforces that want to constrain it. A concluding interview explores why the performances of the most exemplary narrators are so seemingly effortless yet so compelling." -AudioFile Magazine, Earphones Award Winner"Reader Xe Sands voices poignancy, old age, wit and youthful snark beautifully..." -Library Journal, starred review "Narrator Sands depicts Lillian with an intelligent, worldly tone, keeping true to her cadence but alternating a scratchy, elderly voice in the present day with a lighter, younger-sounding voice in the memory flashbacks. ...Sands' voice takes on the quality of a radio reader as she conveys the bits of poetry and advertising jingles, adding humor and another layer of insight into Lillian's character. Sands' affectionate and expressive performance perfectly matches both character and mood." -Booklist, starred review

Lillian's journey may not appeal to all readers but I enjoyed her stroll immensely. Written in a contemporary time period while cleverly transversing several decades, this novel is a history lesson on many levels from architecture to women's rights and equal pay. I'm very glad I read it!

“In my reckless and undiscouraged youth,” Lillian Boxfish writes, “I worked in a walnut-paneled office thirteen floors above West Thirty-Fifth Street.” She took 1930s New York by storm, working her way up writing copy for R.H. Macy’s, to become the highest paid advertising woman in the country. It was a job that, she says, “in some ways saved my life, and in other ways ruined it.” Now it’s the last night of 1984 and Lillian, 85 years old but just as sharp and savvy as ever, is on her way to a party. It’s chilly enough out for her mink coat and Manhattan is grittier now—her son keeps warning her about a subway vigilante on the prowl—but the quick-tongued poetess has never been one to scare easily. On a walk that takes her over 10 miles around the city, she meets bartenders, bodega clerks, security guards, criminals, children, parents, and parents-to-be, while reviewing a life of excitement and adversity, passion and heartbreak, illuminating all the ways New York has changed—and has not.

My Thoughts: Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk: A Novel is a delightful journey through the streets of Manhattan, reminding the reader of the times in which this character lived: 20th Century life with all of its quirks, just as Lillian relishes her own idiosyncrasies. Lillian is the kind of character women might emulate, with her independent streak a mile wide, and her insistence on finding her way on her own a metaphorical “walk through the streets.” A perfect salute to a time long gone, I enjoyed how the walk offered the character an opportunity to reminisce about her life, from the 1930s to the momentous New Year’s Eve in 1984. She looked back at her celebratory moments, but also those that revealed her vulnerabilities. When she suffered from a “breakdown of sorts, and when she realized that, to some, she was no longer relevant, we could relate, as everyone has both good and bad to reflect on in a long life. Despite her realizations, however, she is stalwart and determined to move forward on her own terms. She is definitely a character to root for—and her candid assessments of her life will make her a memorable one. Here, to Lillian! Five stars.

I loved this book. It is so well written with such affection shown toward the main character, Lillian and her love for Manhattan.

This novel made me nostalgic for "my" 1980's NYC days. A uniquely structured book, deftly executed, and well-written -- beautifully in places -- without pretension.

The everyday life of an elderly woman as she walks about reminiscing. Not much of a plot, but a nice book.

I loved this novel and intend to read more by the author. After finishing it I immediately ordered another one to be sent to a friend,

Like reading really great poetry. Excellent story and beautifully written.

Wonderful story of a highly successful advertising woman in the 30's reminiscing about her life. Beautifully written. Will have special appeal to people who remember NY in the 40's and 50's

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