

Ferry Tales

by George N. Giannaris

Booksurge (2008)

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CHARLENE KNADLE RECEIVED HER BACHELOR'S DEGREE FROM HARDING COLLEGE, MASTER'S FROM STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY, AND DOCTORATE FROM ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY. SHE IS A POET (*DANDELION SLEEVES: POEMS OF NATURE AND ORDINARY LIFE; LOCAL COLOR: THINGS, PLACES, PERSONS, EXPERIENCES*) AND NOVELIST (*PAPER LOVERS*) WHOSE WORK HAS BEEN NOMINATED FOR A PUSHCART PRIZE. SHE EXAMINED THE WORKS OF PAT CONROY FOR THE 11-VOLUME LIBRARY REFERENCE WORK, *POPULAR CONTEMPORARY WRITERS*.

George Giannaris describes his book, *Ferry Tales*, as being "primarily for my children," yet I have seldom read an autobiographical work that seems more of an offering to the *world*. (Most recently, I found that quality of voice in the late Nuala O'Faolain's *Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman* and have since read upwards of a dozen such books.)

Giannaris doesn't disguise autobiography as fiction, the way Khaled Hosseini, in most of *The Kite Runner*, seems to. The book is straightforwardly about himself, yet there is a "storybook" feel to the narrative as he relates incident after incident. In the process, the unique characteristics of colorful characters become exposed. His experiences are varied, intertwined with the lives of others, and lived for long durations in different locations—Brooklyn, Queens, both forks of Long Island's east end, and across the ocean in Greece, among others. He has felt included and loved, chastised and shunned; he has seen himself as the "outsider" and as the center of action; he has felt enormous pride and keen embarrassment at members of his family. In short, he invokes a sense of the universal, stimulating in readers memories of our own related but very different lives.

The book is peppered with humor—both smiles and guffaws, all of it organic, none forced. An occasional phrase seems both perfect and admirably witty, some bordering on the literary. And there are passages that suddenly and unexpectedly draw tears.

George Giannaris writes of his own life, yet he often mysteriously seems more observer than actor, even as he lets the reader in on his inner responses and outer reactions. Most of the time we notice his generosity of spirit towards others, even as he lays bare the truths of his humanly angry or mean-spirited feelings.

Educated as an electrical engineer with an emphasis on computers, Giannaris nevertheless has stayed with the family business, that of running a Greek restaurant, *The Hellenic*, located in proximity to the ferry that runs between the eastern end of Long Island's north fork and Connecticut. Relating to so many familiar and new customers on their way to or from the ferry forms the basis of many of the scenarios of the book, hence the title. Yet the heart of the matter is closer, with fellow workers, family, friends, the pressures of sixteen-hour, non-stop days, and with recreational experiences (boating, spear fishing, diving, day trips to exotic places). George Giannaris seems to be one "on whom nothing is lost,"* who is able to recognize the significance in the every-day even as he lives it. The wisdom he weaves into the telling of each true tale of himself teaches and rewards us, even as, entertained, we read with our feelings close to the surface.

*Henry James