



Bad Blood: A Memoir

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From a childhood of gothic proportions in a vicarage on the Welsh borders, through her adolescence, leaving herself teetering on the brink of the 1960s, Lorna Sage brings to life a vanished time and place, and illuminates the lives of three generations of women.

Bad Blood: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review *Bad Blood: A Memoir* for online ebook

Natalie says

Ok read, but nothing special, I didn't think she really had anything particularly new or different to say about the period, and she didn't really have all that exceptional a life, although I was impressed at her determination to sit her exams and go to university despite having just given birth, and would rather have read that story, rather than it just being the last chapter!!

Lnaimark says

Ms Sage is a wonderful writer. The structure and style are somewhat unusual for a memoir, and I definitely appreciate that.

Spending time in a post-war Welsh vicarage with Lorna's lusty vicar grandfather, perpetually sour and angry grandmother, and her ditsy mother---none of whom could manage to lift a broom or to teach Lorna to bathe, apparently---was definitely one of those "Gee, I didn't know people lived like that" experiences. Again....a plus for me Moving out of the vicarage and into "council housing" once her father returned from the war provided yet another look into that period of time.

Lorna was not afraid to make herself look bad...in fact, she worked at it. She seemed so angry (like grandma) and unlovable, I must admit I was quite surprised late in the book when suddenly she's acknowledged as a genius.

One reviewer said that parts of the book stretched belief. That part for me was when she said she couldn't remember having sex and was incredulous to find herself pregnant. Oh well...we all have our coping mechanisms.

I somewhat wish she'd spent more time on the successful part of her life, but--in truth--it's the vicarage and council house years that are more interesting and unusual, so no real issues for me there.

I very much liked that she provided a "what happened to them afterwards" epilogue. Since that epilogue is about a dozen years old, I googled her....and was quite saddened to see that she died not long after the book was published and won an award. But was happy to learn that the daughter is a happy, well-adjusted person.

Lobstergirl says

A quite excellent memoir. Learning about Sage's deprived, mucky childhood, you will be *stunned* what she made of herself. (An academic, award-winning literary critic and author.)

Therese says

There is an arrogance in this book. A haughtiness that keeps the reader at arms length. There is something petulant and mincy about her writing, drudging up the mistakes and misery of others, judging it snidely, and

throwing it down. A good memoirist doesn't come off sounding like a tattle-tale, or if they are, they let their anger and hurt pour out for justification. Her voice is so, "ha ha look at these pathetic fools..." Unpleasant, despite some poetic writing.

K says

Not being familiar with Lorna Sage, I read this strictly from an interest in autobiography. I found myself waiting for something, anything to happen, but the story was told in such a gray, weary manner, even the "big" events in her life seemed mundane.

Connie says

3.5 stars. It was a surprise to read about the unusual childhood of Lorna Sage, a well known literary critic. While her father was away fighting in World War II, young Lorna and her mother lived with her grandparents in a vicarage in Hanmer, Flintshire. Her grandparents had a terrible marriage and were constantly fighting. Her philandering minister grandfather loved to frequent the pubs. He was very bright and passed on his love of reading to Lorna. Her relatives wondered if Lorna had inherited his "bad blood" because they had many interests in common. Her grandmother was useless when it came to cooking and cleaning, and spent most of her time complaining about men, eating sweets, and missing the comforts of her childhood home.

When Lorna's father returned to their village in Wales, she had a more normal life, but never felt that she fit in with her family. She felt that her parents were so close that they really had no need to let anyone else in emotionally. Reading and running wild outdoors were her salvations.

In the final section of the memoir Lorna became pregnant and married at age 16. She left the maternity ward one day, and took the first of her A-level exams the next day. She and her husband, Vic Sage, both graduated from the university in Durham with degrees in literature in 1964.

The book was an entertaining look at Wales in the 1940s and 1950s. Lorna's experiences as a child were both humorous and painful. The three parts of the book also showed how three different married couples related to their spouses, and how each couple faced the challenges of life. She seemed a bit hypercritical of her parents considering that she was not the easiest child, and later received an enormous amount of support and childcare while she was away attending university. Overall, the memoir was well-written, and was awarded the Whitbread prize for biography in 2001.

Yak says

Well-written but not terribly enjoyable memoir of a woman growing up with the world's worst grandparents and mother in post-war England and Wales. These people are so mundanely awful that it's not even entertaining or heartbreaking to read about them, such as with "The Glass Castle" or "Running With Scissors."

Mam says

A peaceful, nearly affectionate memoir of a challenging and poverty driven childhood. Lorna Sage is a fine story teller and steps back enough from her own life to let the reader see and feel for herself.

Hers is the story of an angry, philandering grandfather, a grandmother who hated her husband and a little girl who grew up believing that she was as bad as her grandfather.

In post war England, there was grimness and shortages shared by all, especially in remote villages in the countryside and in Wales. Sage details what the privations and fears looked like in one family, one village.

Cheryl Armstrong says

Wonderful, compelling beginning, the grandfather and grandmother, locked in a dysfunctional marriage, descriptions of the vicarage and the relationship between the author and her family. Though Lorna Sage is an excellent writer, descriptions of place and people are detailed and vivid, the story bogs down as the chapters progress and seems all too familiar.

Jess says

I finished this book feeling pretty inspired - it's amazing what this woman achieved with her passion for books. Slowly paced, but well worth reading and persevering with.

Richard says

It took a little while to get going for me but when it did, I think when Lorna became a rebellious...ish teenager I loved it.

It is also uplifting, funny in a grim way and has some great pictures showing what a stylish lady she was. I was saddened to learn that Lorna Sage died in 2001.

Fine book.

Anne says

Interesting slice of life for post WWII Britain. No dialog made it a little slow going.

Juliette says

Bitter, overwrought, screechy, self-absorbed and self-important: can NOT understand why all her reviewers were so complimentary, although could guess it might be something to do with fear! Sorry, thumbs down.

Emma says

For some reason before reading this book I didn't check when it was published; if I had I would've found it a safe conclusion that the author is dead. And I have no idea why that fact cast a pall over the book; often our authors are never really dead anyway. Poe and Bronte and Wilde and Mailer are as alive to me today as they ever were. But Sage writes with such piss and vinegar, with all of the arrogance and angst and condemnation of the teenager she was that her death was strangely effecting. And somehow her book was transformed and I had the image of her own grandmother gathering the family around for one last rant about men's evils.

The virtue of the book is its fire, and the images of class and virtue, of the old vicar peddling his bike from spinster to spinster. It lost me a little with the descriptions of literature and the role of schools as reproduces of class rather than enablers of class mobility but still, four stars.

Kitty says

Not the page turner it should have been. Had a hard time caring one way or the other about the author. At one point, I almost returned to the library half read. Don't know why I perservered. Now that I am done, I just feel ambivalent.

Jennifer Rolfe says

I found this book a good analysis of social life in the post ww2 period in rural Wales but she told the story and I don't feel very connected to the people. Where was the resolution? Felt the author was rather detached from the whole process.

Stephanie says

I couldn't finish it. It reminded me of *The Gathering* - nice writing, moving story, but it just felt too far away to relate to. For some reason, I just couldn't focus on it long enough to finish it.

Kirsty says

Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* has, like many of the books I review, been on my to-read list for years. I so enjoyed her non-fiction book, *Moments of Truth: Twelve Twentieth Century Women Writers*, and was eager to read

more of her work. Rather than a collection of critical essays, *Bad Blood* is a memoir of Sage's early life in rural Wales during the 1940s and 1950s, and ends with her University graduation. It was published in 2000, and won the Whitbread Prize for Biography just a week before Sage passed away.

Sage's childhood was 'dominated' by her 'brilliant, bitter grandfather - a drinking, womanising vicar, exiled to a parish' just over the Welsh border with England. After the war, when Sage left the 'gothic eccentricity' of the vicarage, she moved into a nearby council house with her parents and younger brother, Clive. Here, she 'soon discovered that real family life was marked by myths, secrets and disappointments of its own.'

'A dazzlingly vivid account of one girl's coming-of-age in post-war provincial Britain,' writes its blurb, '*Bad Blood* is now universally reclaimed as one of the most extraordinary memoirs of the decade.' Hilary Mantel praises it 'both for its generosity of spirit and its intensity as an act of self-recovery', and Claire Tomalin calls the novel a 'classic account of childhood', and Sage herself a 'writer of rare intelligence'. Margaret Drabble writes that *Bad Blood* is a 'vividly remembered, honest, generous, shocking story... A fine transformation of pain into something redeeming - I don't think that's too grand a word. A very moving testament.'

Bad Blood has been split into three parts, which cover distinct periods in Sage's life - the first her early life at the vicarage in Hanmer, the second her transition to grammar school and living with her parents, and the third her surprise pregnancy at aged sixteen, and her determination to receive a University degree. These sections are peppered with photographs. Of Hanmer, Sage writes: 'So Hanmer in the 1940s in many ways resembled Hanmer in the 1920s, or even the late 1800s except that it was more depressed, less populous and more out of step - more and more isolated in time as the years had gone by.'

Sage had such a gift for capturing vivid scenes and unusual characters. The memoir opens with the following description: 'Grandfather's skirts would flap in the wind along the churchyard path and I would hang on. He often found things to do in the vestry, excuses for getting out of the vicarage (kicking the swollen door, cursing) and so long as he took me he couldn't get up to much... He was good at funerals, being gaunt and lined, marked with mortality. He had a scar down his hollow cheek too, which Grandma had done with the carving knife one of the many times when he came back pissed and incapable.' Due to the sheer amount of time which Sage spent with her grandparents, who tolerated each other at best, she had very few memories of being with her parents when she was little. Of her soldier father, away at war, she recalls only that she was picked up by him and was 'sick down his back'.

Bad Blood presents a multi-generational family portrait; Sage scrapes away at the veneers of her family, and reveals what it has been hidden far beneath the surface. She writes with such sincerity about her somewhat dysfunctional upbringing, spent more with books than people, and describes the changing post-war landscape with such detail. Throughout, Sage's narrative voice is lilting and friendly, and she speaks about such varied things, from fashion, farming, and food, to schooling, swimming, and sharing. I enjoyed the second and third sections of the memoir the most; in these, Sage played a more active role in proceedings, rather than merely telling the reader about her grandparents and parents in rather an omniscient manner.

Joyce says

Some of the print reviews call this memoir tenderly written, an exuberant celebration, generous. I'm going to say no to all of that. For the most part the author is a sullen observer of miserable people. One reviewer said it described a time in English villages that England continues to run from - that comes closest to my perception. However there are some pertinent observations on women and their lives and the fact that

intelligence, education, self determination and books can pull them out of drudgery and self destruction.

Chloe Fowler says

I think I heard a podcast about Bad Blood, never knew it existed despite the furore it created at time of publication. Anyway, beautifully written. Gloriously so. A scurrilous, delicious treat.
