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A stark, brutally honest memoir illustrated by one of the world's great cartoonists. This is a gripping and poignant memoir recounting one boy's experiences of deprivation and poverty growing up in a rural farming village during the Great Depression. The short stories are written by John Gallant and illustrated by his son Seth, better known to many as the New Yorker illustrator and award-winning D+Q cartoonist behind the books *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* and the sumptuous *Vernacular Drawings*. Written with a concise honesty and clarity, the stories reveal the sad reality of a boy growing up in brutal social and economic conditions.

Bannock, Beans and Black Tea: Memories of a Prince Edward Island Childhood in the Great Depression Details

Date : Published May 1st 2004 by Drawn and Quarterly (first published March 31st 2004)

ISBN : 9781896597782

Author : John Gallant , Seth

Format : Hardcover 120 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Comics, Graphic Novels, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, History, Comix, Historical

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From Reader Review *Bannock, Beans and Black Tea: Memories of a Prince Edward Island Childhood in the Great Depression* for online ebook

Josh says

Rather than a vanity project for Canadian cartoonist Seth's dad, this is actually a fascinating portrait of a pioneer-type childhood. John Gallant grew up dirt poor in a remote rural part of Prince Edward Island. Taken from the stories Seth's dad told him on long car trips, the book is told in 4-5-page vignettes, interspersed with Seth's gorgeous illos. Like Seth's *Wimbledon Green*, the short pieces add up to an engaging story—and a pleasantly quick read.

As Seth remarks in the foreword, these tales of near starvation, freezing 10-mile walks, begging from the village priest, and the like, are so wry and entertaining that you almost forget the misery that accompanied them. And like *Wimbledon Green*, *Bannock, Beans and Black Tea* is beautifully designed, by Seth himself, and is an art object in itself. It makes another great gift, even for a kid as young as ten.

Hans says

Incredibly gorgeous book design--this is why I still love paper books. The author's stark depression era stories are perfectly nested with his son's crisp and stark illustrations.

It is clear that, as described in the introduction, this is a very personal work for Seth. It's impossible to value these stories as Seth did (and still does) and it's clear that they change in translation from oral stories to the written episodes. I love the collaboration of father and son and wish that I could see more. This is clearest for me at the end when the final story abruptly wraps up.

There are many more stories than can fit in these pages, but it's an honor to be able to spend time with the ones that are here.

Sarah Sammis says

Seth, a Canadian graphic novelist, grew up listening to his father's stories of growing up in extreme poverty on Prince Edward Island. In 2004 he put his father's stories together in a slim volume called *Bannock, Beans and Black Tea*.

The title refers to their basic diet, when they had money for food. Bannock is a fry bread, similar to the American biscuit but fried as a flat bread, sort of like pita or na'an.

The book is a rather bleak memoir. Gallant's family was always struggling for money and it took its toll on everyone. This is not the idyllic PEI of L.M. Montgomery. This is a harsh and cruel island divided into the

haves and have-nots.

The memoir begins and ends with some of Seth's illustrations in comic form. I wish there were more of them peppered through out the book, or even comprising the entire volume.

Liz says

more of a nice Thing-to-have, less of a nice book-to-read.

Damon says

Wow, this was a depressing little guy. Seth talks in his introduction about how he thought these were great stories when he heard them as a kid, full of determination and adventure or something, but they seem pretty bleak in this volume. The book as a whole was beautifully designed, though, and despite being unpleasant the stories are an interesting read.

Gregory Burbidge says

I would have read a book by Seth anyways, but his fathers stories of poverty in PEI were fantastic.

MEGAN C says

I really enjoyed this. The presentation of the book with the illustrations and the style of writing and font really added to it. I thought this was really well done and a nice tribute to his dad.

Never says

File this under "personal memoirs that mean more to the editor than they will to you". I'm a big fan of Seth's work, so I was excited when I came across this used at Myopic, but really there's not much to pull one into it except for Seth's beautiful layout and book design. The stories themselves, while they might have been fascinating to hear told aloud from the man who lived them, fall pretty flat for me in a book-format. Still, the introduction makes clear how important and personal this project was to Seth, and it's really cool that he made this as a tribute to his father.

Vanessa Brown says

This book solidified my adoration for Seth. I think he must be my local history soul-mate. If there was a book that connected the work of Lucy Maud Montgomery with that of Alice Munro, this gothic graphic

novel would be the one to do it. Six degrees of Canadian literature.

Liz says

My, what an angry little book.

Summer says

In contrast to Seth's autobiographical comic, I really enjoyed his design and editing on this book of his father's childhood stories. This book is heartbreaking and beautiful.

Alicia says

Very interesting stories about life during the great depression. Rather sad.

Janice Kenny says

I couldn't put the book down once I started reading it. Being a native Islander and a Gallant, these stories are similar to what I've been told by my grandparents, of what hardships they endured during those times. It made me appreciate how easy we have it, in this day and age!

Diane says

This is basically a vanity book - a father's stories published by his son. The stories are about growing up on PRince Edwards Island during the depression and are very unsophisticated and have no insight or reflection. The author at age 70 plus is still angry at his father who produced 8 children but refused to work or support the family - I suspect he had some mental illness from the few description.

The book is lovely as an object -heavy off white paper with delightful green and black line illustrations in the style of Lois Lenski. The son Seth (his real name is Gregory Gallant)is a fairly well-known cartoonist.

I am not sure why I decided to read this - it is the type of book that would only be in PEI historical society libraries.

Dominick says

Odd little book. Seth's dad's reminiscences about his evidently terrible childhood on Prince Edward Island, in a compact package designed and illustrated by Seth. Even the font is based on Seth's own comics font, so the

book has a handmade feel about it. Not much shape to it, just a series of reminiscences about growing up crushingly poor, with an abusive father. Fun stuff. But it has a certain wry, rueful humour to it, and of course lovely art by Seth.
