

If you're like me, a Royal Canadian Air Farce fan, then you will agree that "Old Enough to Say What I Want: An Autobiography" by Dave Broadfoot is among the most enjoyable books you'll ever read. Broadfoot delightfully describes a life that could have been stultifying. He has a survivor's knack to find and to share humour in life's pompous absurdities. This is his salvation.

Salvation is the conflict in Broadfoot's life. He opens with, "I would have preferred to have been born into a family of fun-loving atheists, but that's not how it turned out." This conflict is the font of his creativity.

Broadfoot loves his parents and his three sisters. He is the youngest of four, and the sole male. He is the only sibling to choose an entertainer's life. His sisters devoted their lives to missionary and evangelical works. His mother was a saintly homemaker.

He was born in North Vancouver, in 1925. His parents were both born in Britain. Like many new Canadians, they came to Canada out of necessity, not by choice. Broadfoot is a first generation Canadian which creates a cultural barrier between him and his parents. Broadfoot explores his relationship with his parents and relationships within families. He asks, "to what extent must parents sacrifice their interests and values for the sake of their children?"

Broadfoot's father, Percy, never fully accepted Canada. Broadfoot is grateful for Percy's selfless toil in order to support his family through the Great Depression. Broadfoot didn't share his father's love of cricket. Only late in his father's life did he learn of Percy's knowledge and love of singing British music hall songs. Broadfoot regrets not being more of a friend to Percy and less of a son to his father.

Beyond examining families, Broadfoot traces Canadian entertainment history. He performed with Wayne and Shuster. He worked in Toronto and in Montreal where he heard a young Ginette Reno. He learned a basic truth about the difference between Quebec and the Rest of Canada. In the Rest of Canada, the entertainment focus is Hollywood. In Quebec, it is Montreal. That applies to everything - comedy, theatre, movies, dance, jazz, symphony, recordings.

He explores the Quebecois relationship with religion during the Quiet Revolution. He recalls that the comedy team, Les Cyniques, did outrageous and often sacrilegious satire. St. Joseph's Oratory, a major Quebecois shrine, became the Miracle Mart - Quebec's equivalent to Safeway. But he returns to families. He compares his first Christmas with his fiancée's family in Hull to childhood experiences.

He recalls, "Her parents' small house was full of relatives coming and going, and not to church. Quebecers, were no longer a people governed by the Church. I couldn't help thinking that leaving the church seemed much easier for these Catholic Quebecers than it had been for Baptist Dave. It all seemed so much more joyful to me than Anglo-Canadian life in North Vancouver."

Of course, if you are looking for Broadfoot's classic dialogues, they're incorporated in the text and in a closing chapter. You'll find Sergeant Renfrew, Big Bobby Clobber and the Honourable Member from Kicking Horse Pass. Call it prescience, but one of Broadfoot's earliest dialogues was prophetic, in the way of Isaiah, "Don't talk to me of graft. There isn't a man in this country who knows more about graft than I do!!! Yes, my friends, in our party we have the answers. So, when you go to the polls, elect a man in whom we can all have confidence. It's time to put a confidence man in the White House."