



The Moon in the Mango Tree

Pamela Binnings Ewen

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Set in Siam and Europe during the 1920s, a glittering decade of change, *The Moon in the Mango Tree* is based upon the true story of Barbara Bond, a beautiful young opera singer from Philadelphia who is forced to choose between her fierce desire for independence—a desire to create something of her own to give purpose and meaning to her life—and a deep abiding love for her faithful missionary husband whose work creates a gap between them.

But when you choose between two things you love, must one be lost forever?

The Moon in the Mango Tree Details

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Author : Pamela Binnings Ewen

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From Reader Review The Moon in the Mango Tree for online ebook

Deber says

This was a great book I was totally surprised. I thought it would be similar to the painted Vail but it definitely followed its own path. A wonderful story about marriage, family, spirituality and deciding what is important in life.

Roberta says

I didn't realize, when I added this to my "to read" list, that it was based on a real person. Suffragette Babs came to adulthood just before women had a lot of the rights they have today - the right to vote being one. At her parents' urging, it was pretty much marry Harvey, be a dutiful wife, have babies. She gave up a prospective opera career to do so, but it nagged at her for many years. I felt conflicted about her decision years later to leave Harvey, dump the girls in boarding school, and Europe-trot in order to see if she could fulfill her dream. When she gave up opera for the second time, at least she felt it was own decision.

The author spends the first 268 pages on Barbara and Harvey's courtship, wedding, and years in the Nan Valley of Siam. The ensuing chapters are brief in comparison (10 pages on Philadelphia, 58 pages on Bangkok, 18 pages on Paris, 11 pages on Lausanne, and 76 pages on Rome). The section on Nan went on much, much too long. I was so tired of the weather reports and the Breedens that I was beginning to think I should've scratched this book from my list. The rest of the book moved along quickly and was much more interesting.

I thought the author should've changed tone in the epilogue. It sounded much too adult to be the words of an eight-year-old.

Kathy says

This book sat on my shelf for many years. I had meant to pick it up, but time kept getting away from me. Now that I have read it, it's one of my favorite stories. I'm surprised to find a story set in 1920's Siam to be so relevant in 2010's United States, and I wonder why I waited so long.

This is a fictionalized story of a real young woman in the 1920's who must make the difficult decision between choosing a career of her own as a singer or following societal conventions to become a helpmate to her husband's career.

The tag line on the cover says, "Can she have it all - or does she have to choose?" This has been a hot topic of late with magazine editorials, books, internet articles and television commentary coming down on both sides of the discussion. Many years ago, I joined an alumnae group just after graduating from college. The women of this organization were a diverse group of thinkers, doers, humorists, and activists ranging from 20 somethings like myself to 80 something. Even with 60 years separating us, I realized we were all telling the same stories of our lives and the decisions we had to make. We shared the same questions about our future, skipped the same classes, worried about men and children. Times hadn't really changed all that much. I

remember feeling very comforted that I wasn't alone. As I read this book, I realized women today are still asking the same questions raised in the story. "Can I really have it all?" "Do I have to choose between a career and a family?" Now, many years removed from my 20's, I have to say that I don't feel quite as comforted by the fact that these questions are still so relevant. Instead, I'm wondering why we're still asking these same questions 90 years later. With all the progress women have made in the last century, why are these issues still so elusive to us?

Liv says

So...I have to pretty much agree with Brittany's review of this book. There are some parts that deserve a high rating, and some that deserve a low one. For example, I felt that the main character was...in some ways...selfishly blind. It's not like I hated her, but I just couldn't admire her. For THE main character, I thought she was a pretty lousy character.

The story is a good one...has a good lesson, I suppose. But a lot happened in the course of the novel--over ten years of the characters' lives passed. So I'm not really sure what the main plot was...

The author did a marvelous job with describing Asian landscapes and European cities. I mean, sometimes you could almost see the setting. That part deserves a high rating.

Only at the end did I even get a sense that God had much of anything to do with the characters' lives--even the missionary characters seemed rather far from the truth. So I wouldn't say this (apparently "Christian") novel is very faith-building, but then again, most of the Christian historical-fiction novels aren't.

Overall, I guess you could say I liked the book. I'm not sorry I read it, but I wouldn't read it again. In many ways, aspects of the story simply frustrated me. And while the ending was a happy one, I felt like it was too rushed and sudden to make up for the depressing, aggravating aspects of the book.

Oh, oh, just one more thing (sorry, this is a long review!). I felt that I "learned" quite a bit about the Buddhist religion from this novel. However, in many passages, if I hadn't known that the author is a Christian, I would have almost thought she was trying to portray the Buddhist religion in a good light. True, the author did portray Buddhism as what it is--a false religion--in the end, but to be completely honest, I think some of the passages concerning the religion kind of caused a "spiritual battle" within me. Which is weird, since I know that the author didn't intend for that to happen. And I don't think it does very often, but just personally for me it was a little shaky.

Kw says

I enjoyed the descriptions of Thailand nearly 100 years ago, of travel and communication in those days, and of the suffragette movement and other topics of the period. The story is charming and engaging for a while, but Barbara gets pretty tiresome as the pages turn. Dumping her children, chasing a dream, drinking and smoking (what do those do to an operatic voice?) and partying and flirting, and toying with her marriage were all were turn-offs for me. She should have insisted on discussing things with her husband, but this was just a bit much.

So I found her immature, selfish and spoiled. The book was good, but I think it could have been so much better.

Rhonda Bentley says

True story - written by her granddaughter based on stories she has been told and diaries left behind.
Wonderful look into the soul of Babs

Lareesa says

I love this book. Barbara was a brilliant main character. I sympathized with her at times and was angry at her at times for her actions during her missionary stay in Siam and her explorations in Europe. She felt like an old friend that called you to debate her life choices. I loved the plot, the characters and the ending. Beautiful book.

Also--people call this Christian fiction? Don't let that turn you off...I completely missed any Christian undertones and in fact felt that it was quite critical of missionaries and Christian charity work.

Devin Engle says

This book really touched me in a way that is hard to explain. It doesn't have the strongest plot, but that's because it's a story about life, it's not a romance novel or an action book. And while occasionally distracting, I loved the beautiful detail that really transported me to all of the places - Siam, Bangkok, Rome, Paris, etc. Most important to me though was the premise about choice. For the importance of this book to my life, I give it 5 stars.

I can see where this book would be less exciting to someone who hasn't struggled in quite the same way with religion, love, marriage and independence. However, for me personally, I felt like I could really understand the main character, who I was delighted to find out was a real person, and the paths she followed. I also loved the author's incorporation of the main character's struggles with religion. Her comparisons were interesting and forced some deeper thought on my part. I was later shocked to find out though that this book was classified as a Christian novel. I found the book to have an interesting spiritual debate within it, but I didn't think it was Christian, so much as it was about personal beliefs and faith, regardless of religion.

I do agree with some other reviewers that the Epilogue was a bit strange. Yet at the same time, I could understand where the author was coming from and how her personal views were written into this final chapter of the book.

Any book that makes you think long and hard about love, marriage, independence, world history, religion and politics is a great novel! This is a story that will sweep you off your feet, carry you to far-away places, and yet will strike you close to home. Well written and beautiful! Thank you to the author for sharing this enlightening story about her grandmother!

Anna says

I picked up this book at the library when looking for a good fiction read. It was about a woman who left

behind a promising music career to follow her husband overseas as he served as a medical missionary.

I was intrigued at the development of the character and her motivations for her choices. She had great internal conflict which shadowed her ability to view her life accurately. I was anxious the entire time about what course she would ultimately choose for her life and the ending did not disappoint.

Ann Manet says

Such a good book.

Belva Shelor says

There are parts of this story I loved but I was really bothered by the main character. She wizened up in the end and was redeemed. However, I spent so many pages wanting to throttle her, that my overall experience with the book was not redeemed. Kind of a let down.

Karen says

This is a beautiful book. The stories were so real and the descriptions so vivid, I was actually relieved to find out that it was based on a real person and real events in her life. It just seemed impossible for this to have been completely dreamed up.

I was a little frustrated with 'our heroine', as it seemed she couldn't get past herself in order to truly appreciate her life, and I was a little concerned about what the final conclusion would be. But, in the end, she figured it out :) And that was the whole point.

The final chapter, from her granddaughter's perspective, and then finding out that her granddaughter IS the author, was a great touch.

I loved every minute of this book, and feel like I FELT, right along with many of the characters. Those lingering emotions are still with me days later. Now that's a good book.

Marie says

I enjoyed most of this book, until the letdown of the ending. It's about a suffragette/opera singer in '20s Philadelphia (Barbara), who marries a doctor (Harvey) and sacrifices her own singing career to travel with him to Siam as missionaries. It's based on the author's grandmother's own experiences.

I loved the descriptions of Barbara's life in a northern village in Siam (now Thailand) and in Bangkok, and her travels in Rome and Paris. The author made those places come alive for me.

The relationship between Barbara and Harvey was somewhat flat, though. One of the central messages of the

story was Barbara's internal struggles between her desire to pursue music and her commitment to her husband. She sacrifices her singing career to move to the Far East with her husband and always wonders what could have been.

I will not give away the ending of the book, but suffice it to say that I was disappointed with the way it ended. I would have preferred more of a compromise than a sacrifice. In addition, the book's "Christian" label really came out at the ending, when it became preachy and patriotic. Ugh. I would have given it four stars until the ending!

Katie says

Set in the Roaring Twenties, this tells the tale of the author's grandmother, a talented young singer, Barbara, who falls in love with a handsome physician, Harvey. Following their marriage, Harvey decides that they should become missionaries in Thailand (then called Siam). This decision ultimately means that Barbara must give up her dreams of singing professionally. While dealing with the hardship and loneliness of missionary life, Barbara continues to struggle with her unresolved singing aspirations. The greatest strength of the story is the rich and vivid geographical descriptions. I feel more enticed to travel to the area after having read the book. The book was readable, and I did not find it to be boring, but the character development wasn't fantastic. The choices that Barbara saw for herself were black and white, in a situation that clearly had many shades of gray, and it was difficult for me to relate to her. She came across as shallow and selfish, and the relationships she had with her husband and children were empty. Then to the question of Christian literature. I generally don't read novels that are defined this way (even though I call myself a Christian), and I'm unsure if this book really fits my definition of the genre. Yes, it is "wholesome" - sex, even between married couples, is only hinted at and no vulgar words are used. On the other hand, the novel did not really address issues from a specifically Christian point of view. This review is based on an Early Reviewer copy, received through LibraryThing.com.

Shelbido says

A beautifully told story. The ending was well worth the read. The Moon in the Mango Tree's message is one we should all keep in mind.
