

GRIFFOUN SOCIETY

Mercy Gruenewald's
Telephone Interview with Author
M W Ashe

MERCY GRUENEWALD: First of all, thank you for taking my call and agreeing to be interviewed this way.

M W ASHE: My pleasure, absolutely. Thank you for your interest. This call promises to be the most-exhilarating occurrence of my entire week. With the world in lockdown, one gets pretty desperate for amusement.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: Where are you passing this lockdown? Or is that something you'd rather not say?

M W ASHE: Oh, I don't mind telling you. I'm in Exeter at my paternal grandparents' home. I shan't give you the address, of course. My grandfather would throttle me. I was in the process of moving from Mexico City to Paris when this corona virus threat became really serious. Actually, I guess it was always serious. But I was laying over here when it dawned on me that I needed to take the threat more seriously. I've now missed my scheduled trip across Europe on the Venice Simplon, and I was really looking forward to that.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: Let's talk about your latest book.

M W ASHE: Oh, yes, let's indeed.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: The title is *Autobiography of Bat Masterson*. I've read it, of course. And I certainly did enjoy it. If, as claimed on the *verso*, it is all true, then Masterson's life was infinitely more fascinating than any work of melodrama or fiction in which he has appeared as a character.

M W ASHE: Bat Masterson's own adventures were numerous enough to fill several novels, but in addition, he was personally acquainted with many others whose fame or notoriety equals or eclipses his own: Wyatt Earp, for instance, Doc Holliday, Bill Tilghman, Ben Thompson, Charlie Bassett, Dave Rudabaugh, Luke Short, Chalk Beeson, Nelson Miles, Billy Dixon, and Buffalo Bill Cody, to name only a few. Masterson was invited by President Theodore Roosevelt to visit the White House and was even offered a presidential appointment. He was an acquaintance of prizefighters John L Sullivan and Gentleman Jim Corbett. He was a close good friend of playwright Damon Runyon. Did you know, by the way, that the character Skye Masterson in Damon Runyon's play *Guys and Dolls* is actually a representation of Bat Masterson?

MERCY GRUENEWALD: No, I had no idea. But that detail is not in your book.

M W ASHE: No, because that came later in Masterson's life. My story is told from the perspective of 1907, when Masterson, age fifty-four, was a newspaper journalist in New York City.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: One aspect of your little book (and it is a very short read, barely 23,000 words) that particularly appealed to me is that it seems to put all the great events related to the taming of the West into their proper order. I mean to say, we all know about the battle of the Little Big Horn, the gunfight at the OK Corral, the siege of Adobe Walls, the surrender of Geronimo, the massacre at Wounded Knee, but only as isolated incidents, not how they relate to one another and which preceded which. After reading your book, I have a much clearer understanding of how these events actually unfolded.

M W ASHE: Good! Then I have accomplished what I set out to do. History, to me, is enthralling, but I realize that not everyone shares my passion. What I try to do is make history interesting for everyone by making it personal to one particular character. In this case, that one particular character was himself a true-life figure. In my earlier book, *Scouting for the Texians*, I created a fictional character, Manuela Ballardo, whom I then allowed to interact with a number of historical figures and to participate in several great historical events herself.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: I have to tell you, I have never enjoyed any book more than I did *Scouting for the Texians*. By the time I finished the last chapter, I felt as though I had actually lived through the years 1830 through 1845 in old Texas. I studied Texas history in junior high. No way was it then as fascinating as living it vicariously through the experiences of a fictional character.

M W ASHE: Stop, stop! My ego is expanding so rapidly, I fear it might burst.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: I'll let you go then. But first, can you give me a hint what your next project might be.

M W ASHE: I have three more historical novels in the works already. *Juneteenth O'Reiley* is about a girl born on the day that slavery ended in Texas. I have already written the first chapter, but I am undecided exactly how I wish to proceed from there. So that one will probably have to wait. *Arizona Female Scout* was suggested to me by a historical photograph by A Frank Randall so labeled in the photographer's own hand. I have written the first chapter of that one as well, and I know just how I want the story to unfold, but I think that I shall put off finishing it for now, simply because I really want to devote myself first to *Cries In Her Sleep*, the story of a fictional Native American artist, who graduates from the Carlisle Indian School, lives and paints in Greenwich Village, then moves to Paris, and finally returns to America to become part of the artists' commune in Taos, New Mexico.

MERCY GRUENEWALD: All three sound fascinating. I look forward to reading them. Thank you for chatting with me.

M W ASHE: Thank you for the attention. Bye.