

## **Book Reviews**

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MAIMIE PINZER, RUTH ROSEN & SUE DAVIDSON (EDS.)

The Maimie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute.

New York: The Feminist Press, 1997, pp: 528, Price: US \$19.95

ISBN: 1-55861-143-6.

Category: Autobiography, Non-fiction and Crime

The book is a compilation of letters penned by an inspiring young woman named Maimie Pinzer who had both lived and left behind the life of a prostitution in her search for a dignified life and identity. These letters which were mostly written to her lifelong friend and confidante Mrs. Mark Howe, dates back to the year 1910 till 1922. The letters being patched together into one volume divided into two convenient sections simply reads like an autobiography. It presents a moving account of a former prostitute who had so much more to her than anyone in her time could imagine. She had sidestepped several stereotypes despite being overshadowed by social norms, stigma and labelling. Maimie had had her share of endless struggles throughout her life but was never subdued in spirit even by the most compelling of circumstances. In fact, Maimie Pinzer was a marginal yet a representative voice of the American working class women of the early 20th century who had struggled and stood her ground as a silent rebel. Most significantly, she had lit the way for countless women like her who had lived through harrowing and humiliating life experiences particularly young girls stepping into or being trapped into prostitution.

The accounts of Maimie provides a detailed insight into her adult life with several glimpses of her past; her conscious efforts of moving away from a deviant life; experiences in menial jobs; unstable economic condition; her worn out marriage; the people she had known; her little joys and various interesting facets of her life. Maimie's honest revelations illuminate her softer side as a person

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where she comes across an affable, affectionate, sweet, sensitive, intelligent, thoughtful, empathic and a caring person. Her charming persona often had her pass as a perfect lady in the social circles and yet she was her own person who would rather keep to herself than keep up false appearances. She experienced the extremes of her emotional as well as her practical nature that had often left her confused and uncomfortable in her own shoes.

Maimie had found a sense of solace in pouring her thoughts and feelings into her letters which she likened to the process of writing a diary. Her continuous efforts at and wonderful gift of writing seemingly eased her mind and soul, providing her with a sense of self in deep introspection as well as retrospection. In her letters, she had also addressed the tug and pull of her conscience; her sharp survival instincts; dissatisfaction with a poor life; an ardent desire for life's luxuries; constant pangs of guilt gnawing into her stream of thoughts; her resorting to manipulation and deceitful means to gain own ends; as well as her literal battles with hunger, loneliness and depression. Having lost her father who was brutally murdered when she was a child and being estranged from her mother for years apart from being disowned by her own brother, Maimie was left to suffer her own fate and fend for herself completely. However, through the course of an eventful life, this bright-spirited young woman had carved her own niche, growing from strength-to-strength as a person while also determining the terms of her life and defining her own identity.

Having known well from her own experiences that life at the lower rungs of the urban American society was challenging and difficult for many young women like her, Maimie's social responsibility had gradually taken the shape of a serious mission as described in the pages of this compelling narrative. Generous in spirit, Maimie was the kind of person who despised the feeling of living in charity as well as being subject to any form of contempt or pity. All that Maimie desired was the comfort of being truly loved, being understood and the right to live with dignity as an individual.

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