

A life of her own

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The first thing that is noticeable in the way Emilie Carles wrote "A Life of Her Own", her autobiography, is the almost straightforward narration that she used in depicting what her life as a little girl living in a rural mountain valley of Alpine, France.

As a married woman, a mother, a schoolteacher and later an activist, had been during the pre-World War and the postwar development phase that took place in France and the world's history. Straightforward, in the sense that no time was given to dwelling in sentimentalities.

Every word written and every image that were portrayed were significant and true in her eyes as a child and as an adult. The purpose of this paper is to show the difference of Emilie Carles from other women because what she wanted to impose in her book is not as easy as making a fictional biography of a woman in the twentieth-century.

Emilie Carles narrated how the people in her village, including her family, confront life's challenges in a day-to-day basis. She depicted a life that is led by poverty, hard grueling work and an almost passive acceptance of the fate and destiny of the people. In her village, she highlighted the importance of the bull or cows and its ability to produce calves, milk and other products to enable a family of four (or more) carry on with their lives.

Her opening statement in her book showed the seeming "unconcerned" attitude of her father to her, even when she fell down the 2-storey house where they live. The bull that he had to buy is far more important than the situation of his daughter. French peasants in Carles' village would usually cry

due to a cow's death than family members. As she have stated, " the torment of poverty outweigh the ruling of the heart".[1]

Through her stories, she helped the readers envisioned a pre-war life in France that is full patriarchal in nature; and almost all marriages are arranged, like her parents'. She wrote that women's lives are usually broken due to its inability to choose whom to marry. Marriages, during her early childhood, are business contracts between two families that are usually decided by the male members. It is usually considered as marriage of convenience, a business contract where land and products will be combined to enable the peasants to live a little more easily.

Her mother tried to fight this culture by running to a benefactor, her revered godmother, to ask for her blessing and advice in not marrying Joseph Carles and instead, marry the one she loves. She was thwarted by her godmother and was informed that to follow the course of her fate is the best advice she could to her. Otherwise, she will become an outcast in their Alpine village. Though her mother did not love Joseph Carles, she gave herself into taking care of her family, becoming the " sap" to her father's " tree"; the " branch" to his " tree" and life and strength of the family.

Her mother was unable to defy the system in the village but she was strong-willed and spoke her own mind when she thinks it is needed. She is generous and knows how to please people such that after her death, people will come to Emilie to tell her that her mother is a remarkable woman. Perhaps, this characteristic of her mother is one of those that Emilie inherited, giving her the willpower and the strength of mind and soul to pursue her career as a schoolteacher and as a mother, as well as being an activist later in life.

Due to the inability of his father to take care of the four siblings left behind by his wife, the youngest, a four-month old, had to be alternately nursed by mothers in the village. Emilie herself was sent to her uncle's place to be taken cared of, as promised by their relative. She will become a schoolteacher later on with the help of her uncle, although life with her uncle had been full of tribulations as her aunt somehow maltreated her by always finding little faults in her.

[1] Carles, Emilie and Destanque, Robert. A Life of Her Own: The Transformation of a Countrywoman in 20th-Century France. 1992. Reed Business Information, Inc.