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- Betsy Kepes, book reviewer

Lueza Thirkield Gelb was born in New Jersey, in the first part of the twentieth century, two years after the stock market crash, and grew up in the Adirondacks before and during World War II. Her book, *Schroon Lake*, won the Best Memoir award Sunday at the Adirondack Center for Writing's annual book awards in Blue Mountain Lake.

Our book critic, Betsy Kepes, has this review.

Writing a memoir is a tricky business. The text can veer off into maudlin memories or self-absorbed angst. In the best memoirs though the story of an individual and the people associated with it goes beyond a family history and becomes a universal story.

**Lueza T. Gelb took years to write her memoir, "Schroon Lake" and the effort was worth it.** In trying to understand her mother and father Gelb asks "why". Why did my parents do what they did and why do humans make mistakes?

Gelb's wealthy grandparents, Mary and Arthur Harris, owned a summer estate at Schroon Lake they called "The Place." Here the extended family gathered for long days of playing in the sun.

In 1938 when Gelb was 7, her family switched to year round living at Schroon Lake staying in the farmhouse on the estate. Her father, known as E.B., dabbled in various money making schemes, but only succeeded in using up his wife's fortune.

Gelb's text wanders back and forth in time from childhood memories to speculation about her parents' early married years and forward to the 1980s and the painful process of cleaning out the Schroon Lake farmhouse with her brother, Dwight after her/their parents had died. While she has pleasant memories of her parents, her brother has only negative ones.

Gelb writes: "I always knew the myth of all of us was phony but I loved the myth. My father worked the way he could work. He felt it would have been a step down to take a steady job. And I was glad he didn't take a regular job and that we didn't live in some sub-division of a large city. Who would I have become without this setting of exquisite beauty, Schroon Lake and "The Place"? I was proud of his stubbornness but only part of me was glad and proud and as soon as I could leave, I was gone."

"Schroon Lake is a memoir filled with love and beauty but also with betrayal and abuse and the ugly power of money.

**Gelb's writing is clear and vivid with each scene highly detailed especially her childhood memories from the years she idolized her father.** Outings were extravagant, all day affairs with mountains of chicken salad, deviled eggs and angel cakes.

Gelb writes: "For these all-family picnics with Grandpa and Grandma and their house guests, at least five cars were used, maybe six. The caravan kept a steady, sensible pace, slow to prevent spillage and breakage as well as to infuriate all drivers for miles behind us."

**Perhaps I found this book especially intriguing because it reveals bits of life behind the gates, down one of the long private drives of the summer people in the Adirondacks.** Gelb grew up as an in-between child, not a local girl like her outspoken friend, Antzie Herlihy but rather as a summer resident who stayed on during the winter, year after year.

"Schroon Lake" contains two sections of black and white family photos and a useful 'who's who' list of family names in the back of the book. As the title suggests Gelb limits most of her musings to the family's Adirondack history. Her writing is not as focused when she veers into speculative recreations of her parents' young adult years in the mid-west and in Texas.

Is it ever possible as an adult to look back on childhood and understand who our parents were? **Maybe not, but Gelb does an admirable job trying.**