

Washington Post Dec. 8, 1991

## **GRAVEYARD PEACHES: A California memoir**

By Celeste De Blasis

St. Martin's. 306 pp. plus 8 pages of photos (not incl. with proofs). \$18.95

Autobiography is often more what we remember than what actually happened.

In *Graveyard Peaches*, historical novelist Celeste De Blasis's reminiscence of growing up on her grandmother's California guest ranch, time mutes the trivial and sketches the colorful onto a vivid, arcadian canvas.

The ranch hosted the famous—Greta Garbo, Groucho Marx, John Wayne—but the indelible portraits here are of De Blasis's family. One grandmother was the valedictorian of the 1913 USC's law school class, "a bizarre blend of Auntie Mame, Queen Victoria and God." The other was a lapsed Catholic who "had been propositioned by a priest in Italy, which she took as a sign God did not want her in his church." Balancing the eccentric caricatures, De Blasis writes poignantly of her younger brother's early death from cancer and her own discovery, at 22, that she had lupus.

De Blasis lifts this from the self-absorbed to the artistic on her vibrant prose. Of receiving eyeglasses at 12, she recalls, "The world had become an Impressionist painting, full of swirling color, rather nice, but not clearly defined. The first day of wearing glasses was a voyage of rediscovery. I had forgotten that leaves and flowers had precise edges, that birds were sharply cut against the sky."

Sharing here what she chooses to see clearly, De Blasis recreates childhood in the tone of historical fiction, her eye on the truth rather than the facts.