



Betty Smith: Life of the Author of *a Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

Valerie Raleigh Yow

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When Betty Smith wrote her autobiographic novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the working class and the issues confronting women of this class were not considered to be appropriate subjects by the literary establishment-men. Over sixty years later, this novel, which was an immediate bestseller when published in 1942, is still selling.

The child of German American parents, Betty Smith was born and raised in the immigrant slums of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Forced to go to work at the age of fourteen, she never graduated from high school, but she achieved success as a playwright and novelist, writing four bestsellers over the course of her career. She married three times, was divorced twice, lived for many years with her lover, attended and taught graduate-level courses, raised two daughters, and supported her family during the Depression. While her writing focused on Brooklyn, she lived and worked for most of her adult life in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This is the first published biography of Betty Smith.

Valerie Raleigh Yow has a PhD in history from the University of Wisconsin. She has published two previous academic books and a biography of North Carolina novelist Bernice Kelly Harris (Louisiana State University Press, 1999) and is a psychotherapist in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

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