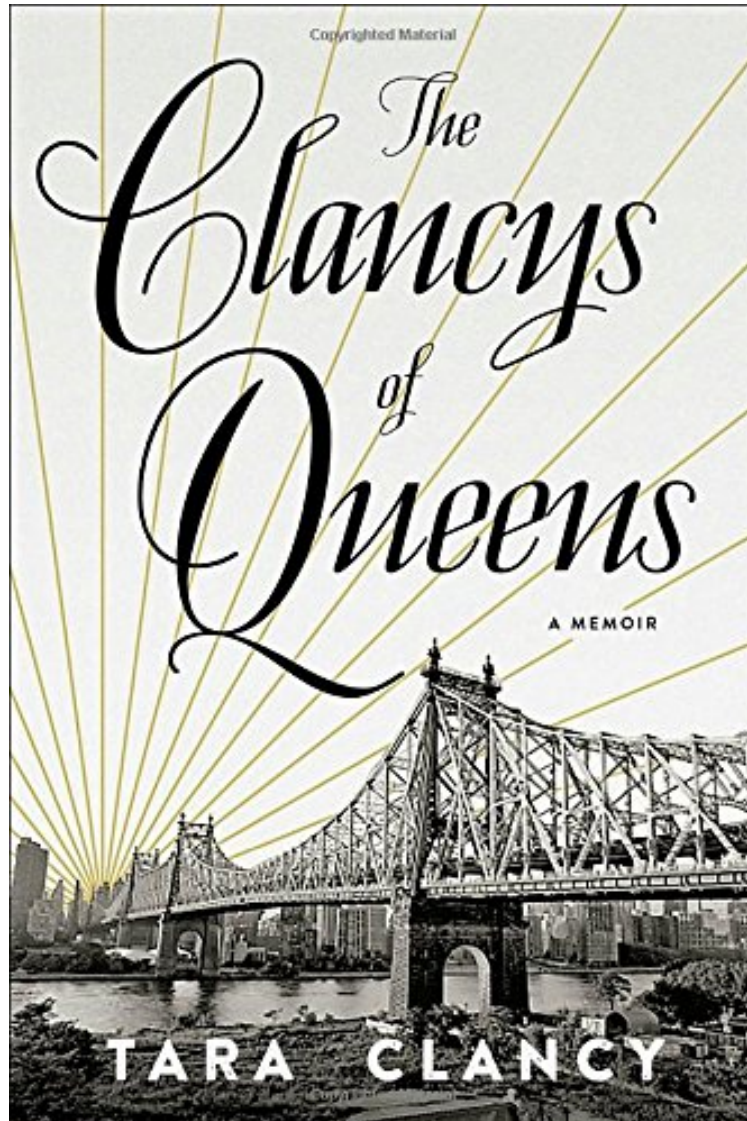


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The Clancys of Queens: A Memoir

Tara Clancy

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Tara Clancy : The Clancys of Queens: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Clancys of Queens: A Memoir:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Growing Up Among Unique Queens Working Class PeopleBy
Arlington CoryTara Clancy's voice is tough, true, loving and funny. She takes us with her as she grows up as a
scrawny tomboy nicknamed Scooter in the care of three primary households: her divorced mother's large raucous
rough Queens Italian family, her Irish NYPD father's large Irish clan and his hard-drinking friends, and her college

educated cleaning lady mother's weekend home with her longtime significant other who is a self-made business man and connoisseur. We ride with her at five in a limousine to The Hamptons and then on her toy pickup truck around and around the estate, as well as, as a preteen with her beloved gentle Italian insurance salesman grandpa retrieving errant tennis balls off the Belt Parkway. And during the scary rides back from his pub with her Dad. We also go with her and her teenage buddy sneaking joy rides in her mother's car and never getting caught. We meet lots of unique characters on Tara's road to maturity and self discovery. Throughout the journey Tara's People love her as best they can and she gets it, she really gets it. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Get Audio Book!!! By Farmer Ted As a West-Coaster, I've always been fascinated by the life / times of living on the East-Coast. Tara does a great job in the telling of her story. I didn't know we are roughly the same age, so hearing how the East half of the country lived during the my same time period made it more interesting. Some parts of the book get a little dragged-out, especially when she goes into specific details. It is funny I enjoy hearing about her parent's life more than hers. I learned how to swear in Italian!!! Do yourself a favor and get the audio book of this. For a West-Coaster, hearing Tara's accent, telling her story, really made it for me. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Tale of Two NY's, told by a very talented author By K. Locke Tara Clancy's memoir veers from laugh-out-loud funny to "who's cutting onions". Her unique perspective, gained from growing up as a child of divorced parents who occupied very different worlds, makes this a thought provoking, memory-evoking, memorable read. From Broad Channel to the Hamptons, and all the social and economic levels in between, Ms. Clancy has lived it and she relates her tale beautifully. I hope to hear much more from this talented voice of NY!

Fifth-generation New Yorker, third-generation bartender, and first-generation author Tara Clancy was raised in three wildly divergent homes: a converted boat shed in working class Queens, a geriatric commune of feisty, Brooklyn-born Italians, and a sprawling Hamptons estate she visited every other weekend. This childhood triptych comes to life in *The Clancys of Queens*, an electric, one-of-a-kind memoir. From scheming and gambling with her force-of-nature grandmother, to brawling with eleven-year-old girls on the concrete recess battle yard of MS 172, to hours lounging on Adirondack chairs beside an immaculate croquet lawn, to holding court beside Joey O'Dirt, Goiter Eddy, and Roger the Dodger at her Dads local bar, Tara leapfrogs across these varied spheres, delivering stories from each world with originality, grit, and outrageous humor. But *The Clancys of Queens* is not merely an authentic coming-of-age tale or a rowdy barstool biography. Chock-full of characters who escape the popular imaginings of this city, it offers a bold portrait of real people, people whose stories are largely absent from our shelves. Most crucially, it captures in inimitable prose the rarely-heard voices of New York's working-class women. With a light touch but a hard hit, *The Clancys of Queens* blends savvy and wit to take us on an unforgettable strata-hopping adventure.

Praise for Tara Clancy's *THE CLANCYS OF QUEENS* The *Clancys of Queens* overflows with buoyant exuberance [and] much of its magic lies in its narrators frank, funny voice and evident passion for a good story. [Its] a winningly sunny tribute to the strong ties of kinship [and] Clancy has the literary prowess to do it justice. Elle The oddities of *Clancys* upbringing make for some hilarious passages, but each chapter also forms a love letter to her parents, Grandma Rosalie, Mark, her friends and lovers. A breezy, funny memoir with a wonderful cast of characters and a terrific sense of place. BookPage Affectionate [and] well-observed. Newsday *Clancys* keen observational humor and authentic working-class New Yorkese survive the transition from stage to page as she crafts a love letter to the family that raised her. Clancy sketches these people with telling details and great affection. That *Clancys* personal chronicle is not the bright shiny output of the memoir industrial complex is somewhat of a relief; instead we get an anthropological report of a disappearing world of white, ethnic, working-class New Yorkers, and we hear from working-class women who are often silent in literature. The Rumpus Hilarious, inspiring, and that rarest of animals a memoir full of honest good cheer. [Clancy] writes with the confidence of a practiced raconteur. [Her life is] exceptional in its realness and resilience, and tremendous in the telling. Lambda Literary Tara Clancy's debut has it all humor, fascinating characters, glimpses into radically different lifestyles, intergenerational strife and celebration, insightful Hamptons references and hope, lotsa hope. This rich memoir reminds the reader that we are all many people. Dan's Papers Tara Clancy delivers a memoir with warmth, truth and chutzpah that makes *The Clancys of Queens* a fun read. She finds the heart and life that epitomize Queens in a way that will delight both New Yorkers and outsiders alike. Clancy not only does a beautiful job rendering the different stages on which she lived her childhood, but also excels at emphasizing the dissonance between them. Clancy offers a lighthearted look at growing up among the salt-of-the-earth in America, and *The Clancys of Queens* does what all good memoirs do: It begins from the unique situation of a life and fans out to reveal the feelings we all share. Bookreporter.com An intimate coming-of-age chronicle... [from] a sharp-tongued, hip-hop-loving sneaker enthusiast whose relentless attempts at disrupting the tranquility of nearly every situation make up the bulk of the antics in the book's 21-year sprawl... The heart of *Clancys* thoroughly enjoyable narrative lies in her examination of life in the spaces between social classes, and the threads of humanity shared equally by the local pothead high schoolers, antique-collection Hamptons businessmen, and the Irish-American cops of New York City. Publishers Weekly In this laugh-out-loud memoir *Clancys* writing crackles with wit

and candor. As Clancy whirls with feverish tomboy energy from one escapade to the next, she gives a fantastically vivid view into her many worlds. Booklist Clancy's story will strike a nerve funny and touching. Kirkus s The fierce voices of working class women are too often inaudible in our top-down social economy, but when Tara Clancy breaks through, she dazzles us with authenticity, hilarity, and insight. The relentless honesty of her book will capture your heart. Andrew Solomon, author of *Far from the Tree* This memoir is blessed by a narrating voice of such vivid originality the reader cannot help but relish the life it details. Vivian Gornick, author of *The Odd Woman and the City* Real peoples stories are more interesting than fiction because real American life is full of weird connections, from city to country, from Queens to Montana, from high-class to low-class, from straight world to underworld. Ms. Clancy's rambunctious memoir is a buster of artificial barriers. She goes global, widening the mind. Her setting the Byzantium of Queens is the place to do it. I love this memoir for its brash heroine, her bracing voice, her love of her father, her unquiet soul, and the social history she gives of a violent, energetic, fast-evolving world which is bigger than most people can imagine. Atticus Lish, author of *Preparation for the Next Life* Tara Clancy's freewheeling memoir is a refreshing look at New York City, one that crosses many bridges: the ones between boroughs and the ones between social classes. The Clancy of Queens is one woman's story, but it also captures the vitality and sense of possibility of the city. Elliott Holt, author of *You Are One of Them* Tara Clancy is my new favorite bad ass. The Clancy of Queens is a hilarious love letter to my favorite city and to working class families everywhere. Stephen Adly Guirgis, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of *Between Riverside and Crazy* I'd been introduced to Tara Clancy by her stories on *The Moth*, but I was innocent of the joys of her prose. In *The Clancy of Queens*, indelible moments tumble upon moments even more memorable until they form a blissful cascade as she recounts a New York City childhood that teeters from hard scrabble to posh. I defy you not smile for the length of this book! I loved it. Jon Cryer, actor and author of *So That Happened* About the Author Tara Clancy's writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Paris Daily*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *The Rumpus*. She has told several stories on *The Moth Radio Hour*, and has hosted their live shows in New York City and throughout the country. Her stories have also been featured on NPR's *Snap Judgment*, *Risk!* and *The Story Collider*, among other programs. Tara was born and raised in Queens. This is her first book. www.taraclancy.com Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. prologue

Im the whirling dervish of Queens, spinning around and around, arms flapping, my fathers boxing gloves like cinder blocks strapped to my seven-year-old hands. With a single left hook, Tommy O'Reilly, my best friend, has just knocked me blind. But the goddamn gloves are so heavy, I cant even lift them, so, unable to punch or see, I start flapping and spinning, gaining speed as I go, praying the added centrifugal force will do the trick and if science fails me, at least Ill look so nuts that maybe he wont try again. The ring is our front yard, a splotch of grass split in half by a cement path and hemmed by a short and shabby chain-link fence that surrounds both of our houses: mine looks exactly like a single-wide trailer, but its actually a converted former boat shed that sits in front of Tommys proper two-story Colonial. The whole setup is like some modern-day feudal arrangement, except instead of a lord and lady, theres the O'Reillys. And instead of it being medieval Europe, its Broad Channel, Queens, 1987. I live in the shed with my father I am a first-grader, he is a cop, and we are the serfs. For the past five years my dad has lived in the O'Reillys old boat shed because it was the first place in his hometown he could find, and afford, after my parents divorce. I spend every other weekend there with him, and we have a routine. We share the pullout couch, and after he falls asleep, I crawl out from the crook of his back to the end of the bed and turn up the heat on our electric blanket. In the morning he tells me not to do it again. Because there is nowhere to go when we get out of bed, we dont. Instead, first thing in the morning he turns his tube socks into puppets called Filbert and Albert, who are mute and whose only shtick is fighting and making up. My dad can keep them going for close to an hour. Eventually we have our breakfast and go to Mass, and then I spend the rest of the day playing with Tommy O'Reilly. Every so often playing just means trying to punch each other in the face. Broad Channel is a bread crumb of an island between Howard Beach and Rockaway, with a single through street, Cross Bay Boulevard, and cross streets that dead-end at the water. Far off in the distance you can see Manhattan, its familiar miniature metal geometry in a strange frame of fog and reeds. Weve got no supermarket, high school, pharmacy, or library. Almost everything is on the other side of the bridges at either end of our town. For better or worse, we are 2,500-odd people adrift in Jamaica Bay, untethered from the rest of the world. Really. No poetics intended despite being in Queens, Broad Channel isnt even connected to the New York City sewage lines. Instead, we have septic tanks. Even our shit cant escape. Most people here are Irish Catholic, so we do have more than our share of bars and a church, St. Virgilius. My dad was an altar boy there and has been a devout Catholic ever since. In fact, becoming a cop was his second-choice career. His first was to be a priest. He even went into the seminary, fervently hoping God would call him. As it turns out, He didnt. My dad left with no hard feelings and soon afterward discovered that, while he wasnt cut out for bringing Gods love to the masses, he was just great at throwing them in jail. He became a warrant-squad cop, which is basically a bounty hunter for the NYPD. In addition to our bars and church, Broad Channel has two corner stores, one owned by Mr. and Mrs. Kroog and the other owned by Kim. We call them Kroogs and Kims, which may or may not be the actual names of the stores. I love Kroogs because, together with the typical candy and chips, the store also sells all the old 50s-era toys: jacks, yo-yos, and those paddles with a rubber ball attached by string the kinds of toys kids never have a hard time getting their dads to buy. Kim is a friend of ours and the

sum total of Broad Channels ethnic diversity. Since I turned seven, my dad has been letting me walk the three blocks from our house to Kims, alone, to get us our snacks: Yankee Doodles for him and a twenty-five-cent bag of BBQ potato chips for me. But Dad tells me I have to walk up Cross Bay to get there, not along the more desolate Shad Creek Road, where we live. The one time he caught me taking the unapproved route, I was grounded. (In our little house, which has only one room, that meant being banished to the couch.) That particular time I sat there mouthing, I hate you. I hate you. I hate you. Finally, Dad yelled, Stop that, will ya?! Im calling the police! I said, naturally. He cracked up, then looked me dead in the eye and said, I AM the police. My jaw dropped. Sure, I knew he was a cop, but in that moment, I really believed he was all cops, like some sci-fi supreme omniscient cloned being. I sat in stunned silence for the remainder of my banishment. Beyond our bars, church, and corner stores, Broad Channel also boasts not one but two veterans halls. But if you had called either of them the veterans hall, I wouldnt have known what you meant. To me theyre the VFW, which is nothing more than a place you go for a party. And no matter whose party it is or what its for, there will be aluminum trays of Swedish meatballs and baked ziti, giant plastic tubs of potato and macaroni salads, bowls of potato chips, and cans of beer. And music playing from a boom box. The smaller of the two VFWs is an arms length from our little house, and by 9:00 p.m. on a Friday or Saturday, without fail, Bruce Springsteens Bobby Jean comes blaring through our walls. But you never complain about the Boss. Broad Channel has boats, toolots of old rickety ones and a handful of sleek, fast ones. And whether you have a boat to moor or not, most waterfront houses have long wooden docks extending from their back door into the bay. On summer days we kids spend hours fishing off the docks or swimming in the bay or tumbling down the dunes. But this is not that kind of day. Today, instead of doing any of those lovely things, we are boxing ourselves blind. Unable to stave Tommy off, in addition to my spinning and flapping I start to scream, I cant see! I cant seeeee!! And then I hear his feet come to a stop. Jimmy and Richie OReilly, his brother and cousin, are our only spectators. Up until this point they have been chanting, Fight! Fight! Fight! But even they go quiet. Then Richie, who is the Peanuts character Linus come to life, leans in to me and asks, Ya okay, Tara? I stop spinning and scream, Im blind, goddamnit!!! . . . Around the time Tommy punched me in the face, the stretch limousine on its way to pick me up at my little house would have just exited the Belt Parkway. As I started my flapping and spinning, it would have been cruising down Cross Bay through the Italian stronghold of Howard Beach. I imagine a couple of guys in sweat suits and white leather slip-on Keds peering over their cigars at the limo, wondering, Whos gettin married? Or, Prom already? But they probably werent thinking, Betcha that limo is going to pick up the Channel Rat Clancy girl who just got her lights knocked out on her front lawn. Either way, after passing Golds Gym, Vincents Clam Bar, and Russos on the Bay, perhaps at the very moment I screamed Im blind, goddamnit, that limo would have been nearing the last major landmark you hit before the bridge to Broad Channel, the Big Bow Wow. Theres a chance, if the limo wasnt coming to get me, that Dad and I would have gone there that night. As always, wed have slid into one of the Bow Wows burnt-orange Formica booths and scarfed down their famous hot roast beef sandwiches before the bread got too soggy and fell apart in our fingers. Afterward, wed go into their arcade to play skee-ball. As usual, my father would dance around on his tiptoes like Fred Flintstone before flamboyantly drawing back his arm and firing a ball up the lane. But there wasnt gonna be any skee-ball showdowns or steaming sandwiches today. As the limousine climbed over the bridge to Broad Channel, the driver might have the A train chugging along on his left, crossing its own bridge toward the end of the line. To his right would stretch the wide expanse of Jamaica Bay, toy-size boats bobbing amid swirls of marsh in front of the very distant tail end of Manhattansnapshot perfection for all of three seconds. When you reach Broad Channel, there is nothing on either side but green for a mile-long stretch on Cross Bay the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, a national park and bird sanctuary. As you drive past, you might see a wild turkey or a birder with binoculars or an enormous osprey with a fish dangling from its beak flying inches above the windshield of some guys Oldsmobile. More typically, though, you dont see any people or rare birds just a pleasant, mile-long patch of woods, immediately followed by toilets. Rows and rows of blue plastic porta-potties mark the end of the beautiful national park and the start of our town. Its the headquarters of the Call-A-Head Corporation, our most profitable locally owned business. And, after seeing the porta-potties themselves, you come upon a sign with their motto: call-a-head, were number 1 at picking up number 2! After that genius bit of marketing, there are just rows of homes a mix of battered clapboard shanties and sprawling, bay-windowed beauties. Ours is on Shad Creek Road, a slanted little street just past a lot filled with abandoned cars, among them my dads rusted, long-dead, yellow 74 Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. Our home is by far the smallest in town, and when the driver pulls up out front, the house and the limo arent much different in size. . . . Tommy, Jimmy, and Richie stand in silence, staring at their sneakers, as my dad waves two fingers in front of my face. My eyes follow them until he unfurrows his brow and says, Youre just fine now, Scooter. But right before he walks away, he looks down. Cupping one of my gloved hands in his, he shakes his head. No wonder! Jesus, next time you kids wanna box, well getcha kids gloves them things are for practice, sixteen ounces apiece, ya mopes! We all shrug. And after a half-second pause, Tommy says, So, you wanna go play in the lot? I smile and take off running for the gate. But I never make it. Halfway there I see the limo and stop dead. Jimmy, Richie, and Tommy pile up behind me. Damn, Tara, its already time? someone says to my back. I drop my arms to my sides and manage a slow, disappointed nod. Looking behind me, I see my dad standing in the doorway of our house with my duffel bag. He gives me a hug,

You have fun, Scooter, okay? I wanna stay. I know, kiddo. It'll be all right. The driver opens the door for me, and I climb in. Out the right window my dad waves, and out the left Tommy, Jimmy, and Richie scale the chain-link fence of the lot. When I twist the mental radio-tuner dial of my memory as far back as it'll go, I get staticky snippets of my parents and me from my earliest days, but that sweet, crystal-clear reception actually first comes in on the time I spent with my grandparents. In other words, as best as I can remember, life begins for me in a tiny ad hoc geriatric Italian village on 251st Street in Bellerose, Queens. With both my mom and dad working double-time after their divorce, starting at age three I spent the weekdays in the care of my grandma, Rosalie Riccobono, who lived, of course, with my grandpa, Bruno Ricky Riccobono, who in turn shared a two-family house with my great-aunt, Mary Zacchio, that just happened to be next door to the homes of two other Italian American septuagenarian couples, Tina and Lenny Curranci, and Anna and Joe Paradise. And though I was with my parents on weeknights and weekends, bouncing between their vastly different worlds, my most vivid early memories are born in this four-hundred-meter stretch of street, in these three abutting houses, with these seven elderly Italians. In my mind, the scene plays like one continuous Steadicam shot tracking me as I weave my way through side doors to kitchens, down hallways to living rooms, from one house to the next, to the next, casting off hellos left and right, like Henry Hill in the Copacabana in Goodfellas. That shot begins when a sharply dressed Ray Liotta hands the keys of his Caddy to the valet on a bustling Manhattan street outside the club and then makes his way inside with the beautiful Lorraine Bracco on his arm. My scene begins with my mother's beat-up blue Oldsmobile screeching to a halt in front of The Geriatrics of 251st Street compound and me, age five, hopping out in a pair of jeans with the knees torn out and an Incredible Hulk backpack. At the time, 1985, Mom and I still live in the house my parents once shared, ten minutes away in Rosedale, Queens, but she drops me at Grandmas every morning before heading to work. I was in kindergarten at PS 133 in Bellerose, but on days like this one, when I was off from school, I wasted no time in starting my rounds. Right after Mom peels out, I leap up Grandmas stoop steps two at a time, yank open the screen door, and head into the kitchen to find my grandpa on his way out to work. In his late fifties, after thirty years of driving a truck for Linens of the Week, he got a job at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. And now, at seventy, he still works five days a week, taking great pride in stuffing his barrel chest and thick legs into a perpetually too-tight, brown polyester suit. With his round belly, big bulbous nose, and deep, genuine happiness, Grandpa is as close to Buddha as an Italian-born, Brooklyn-bred, truck-driver-turned-life-insurance-salesman has ever been. When I appear, he is standing at the kitchen sink, displaying his typical toothy grin between blissful gulps of his infamously disgusting breakfast concoction: hunks of rock-hard, stale Italian bread jammed into the bottom of this one particular red-rimmed, white enamel pot, then topped with a couple of cups of sweet, milky coffee and cooked until the whole mess could be eaten with a spoon like porridge. He calls it zuppe (soup), which just makes it sound worse, and of his six children and eighteen grandchildren, only he and I don't find it repulsive. Morning, Shrimpy! he says, putting the last spoonful into my mouth before planting a drive-by kiss on my forehead as we head our separate ways.