

A CONVERSATION WITH BONNIE J. ROUGH

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

Carrier began in 2004 as a story about my mother and grandfather. At the time, I was newly married and childless, and the best true

the West on three separate research trips. I dug up legal documents, court papers, medical records, business transactions, family photos, and my mother's and grandparents' personal letters and notes. I interviewed my family,

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story I knew was the tale of my mother's childhood in the shadow of her father's troubled life. For three years, I researched and wrote their story, without realizing how it was eventually going to connect to my own life. I had a professor who kept asking why I needed to write this narrative about my forebears. I thought, "Well, because it's a great story—why not?" But finally he asked me point blank: "Isn't it true that your grandfather's story represents your own worst fears for your children?"

What research did you undertake in writing *Carrier*?

To uncover my family history, I traveled all over

my grandfather's old friends, even the families of my grandfather's deceased acquaintances. I interviewed detectives, doctors, even a coroner. I made sure to walk on the old farmstead, visit my mother's childhood homes, smell the earth, feel the heat in the air. Where concrete evidence couldn't bring perfect clarity, I used my own impressions, experience, and common sense to connect the dots.

What do you like most about the book?

I love hearing readers say *Carrier* is a page-turner. It took five years to write, so I think I was worried it would take five years to read! But so many readers have shared with me that they

were so gripped that it only took two or three days from cover to cover. I'm proud to have written a true story with such a strong pull.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

Even before I could spell, I knew I wanted to be a writer. When I was five, I filled a miniature notebook with a story about two kids and their kitten. I handed my mom the "book" I had written, and part of her encouragement was to tell me she loved my choice of "Fussy" for the kitten's name. "Fuzzy," I corrected her. "Z's, then," she corrected me, and I got busy with my eraser. I still love to be edited. Working with my agent and editor to take each chapter of *Carrier* to new heights was the absolute best part of my publishing experience.

How has living in Minnesota informed your writing?

Dozens of scenes in my book demonstrate how Minnesota interweaves with my life. The landscape supports my inner life while the neighborhoods and people enrich my social life. And beyond *Carrier*, with a Bush Artist Fellowship, a McKnight arts fellowship, a Minnesota State Arts Board grant, and now a Minnesota Book Award, the legacy of Minnesotans gave me the best imaginable start to my writing career. My awe and gratitude remain fresh.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

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General Nonfiction
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Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
Minnesota Novel & Short Story
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MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner



carrier

UNTANGLING
THE
DANGER
IN MY DNA



BONNIE J. ROUGH

"There are many things to praise in Bonnie Rough's depth of research... but most striking are her compassion and her wisdom." — Jane Hamilton

Carrier: Untangling the Danger in My DNA

by Bonnie J. Rough

COUNTERPOINT

Carrier

SUMMARY

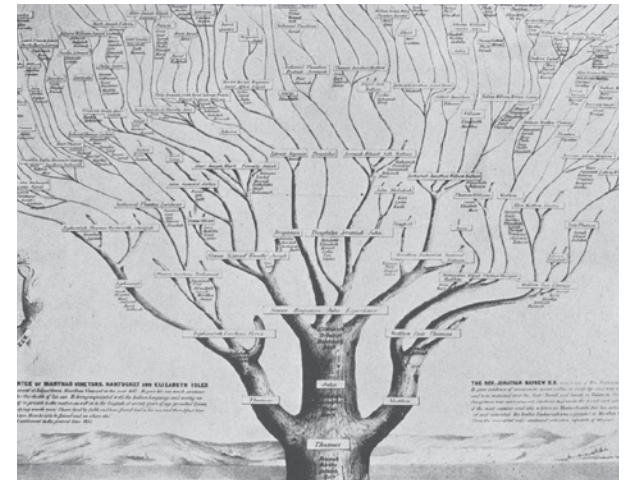
As Bonnie Rough and her husband consider becoming parents, their biological legacy haunts every decision. A carrier of the genetic condition hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia (HED), Bonnie begins a journey to uncover the complicated details of her family's past. At first glance, HED seems to be only a superficial condition. But a closer look reveals it as the source of a lifetime of infections, breathing problems, and drug dependency for Bonnie's grandfather who suffered from the disorder and died penniless and alone at the age of forty-nine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Do you agree with the author's decisions? Whether or not you agree, did you empathize with the author in her journey?
3. Simple blood tests can now show whether a person is a carrier of over 1,000 genetic disorders that could be passed to offspring. If you could be

tested, how much would you want to know, and how would you use that information?

4. Genetic testing is widely used but still controversial. What is the balance between harm and good with this new medical technology?
5. In *Carrier*, the author has tried to convey a loving respect for her family even as she reveals their story, which is not always flattering. To what extent is she successful?
6. What qualities in a memoir can make it a page turner? Did you experience *Carrier* as a page turner? Why or why not?
7. If you wrote a memoir about your own family history, what part of the story would take the most courage to write?
8. In addition to her own voice, the author writes in the first-person voices of her mother and grandfather. Was this technique used effectively, and can it be justified as nonfiction?
9. What part of the author's journey stayed with you most after you closed the book? What was the most meaningful part of *Carrier* for you?
10. If you were to have a conversation with the author about *Carrier*, what questions would you have for her?



ABOUT BONNIE J. ROUGH

Bonnie Rough has an MFA in Nonfiction Writing and has taught at The Loft Literary Center. Her writing has appeared in several anthologies, magazines, newspapers, and literary journals. She has traveled extensively and calls three cities home: Minneapolis, Seattle and Amsterdam.



Learn more about the author and her work at

www.bonniejrough.com and www.thebluesuitcase.com.



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