Clarion Review

Biography

7 Days in the Fire
Helen D. Noel
978-1-4343-4848-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

Sleepless and in the grip of a serious illness for seven days Helen D. Noel experienced “hell on earth” and lived to write the book she had felt called by God to write. Combining faith family lore and service to God church and country she “talks story” the way only an African American woman committed to living her truth in all ways could. Interspersed with descriptions of the pain and fever of her sudden illness the author relates deeply felt memories of the family community and faith that shaped her character and takes readers into the mind and heart of one who is able to sing songs of the Beloved even from within the fires of purification.

Noel grew up in Ohio the eighth of ten children in a home filled with love and the discipline of parents and church. She joined the United States Air Force in 1985 and she and her husband who is also in the Air Force have two children. With retirement imminent she plans to publish her poetry and continue her family and church involvement.

The author declares that “trials and tribulations” need not be feared; they are meant to build and shape one’s character in the same way that a farmer prunes and shapes his trees so that they produce an abundant harvest. During her illness Noel’s faith helped her to realize that “we are never alone.” Calling on the name of Jesus when the pain seemed too heavy to bear helped her endure her suffering without bitterness.

“Spirit-filled” Christian readers especially those of African American descent will hear a familiar cadence in Noel’s writing; she weaves Scripture and prayer with chronicles of family life in an age when extended family could be counted on in good times and bad and children were taught to “respect their elders.” Her faith taught her that even one’s darkest secrets can be forgiven by God and she has seen that those who come to God for forgiveness and healing are not likely to carry past suffering into new relationships freeing generations from the pain and stigma of abuse. The author shows how to use the Bible as a guide for understanding one’s roots and counsels building on “the foundation of the past” while considering the past—and any

mistakes it holds—as “a stepping-stone not a stumbling block.”

Noel offers an intimate portrayal of a Christian woman who endured a battle with serious illness confronted the very real possibility of her own death and managed to use it all for good. This memoir of her sojourn in “the fire” may comfort those who share her faith and remind even those who have neither religion ethnicity nor background in common with her that facing one’s own mortality dispels the illusion of control and can result in an awakening to the significance and beauty of each day lived with love forgiveness and gratitude.

Kristine Morris