Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

A Checkered Path to Destiny
Ivan L. Flynn
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

In *A Checkered Path to Destiny*, Ivan L. Flynn, a native of Jamaica who now lives in the United States, recounts how he overcame a number of obstacles—familial, societal, and self-imposed—to become a productive citizen, a loving husband, and a devoted father. While Flynn speaks well of his parents and his stepmother, it is clear that being born into a broken home plays a significant role in his life. He looked to people he felt had high ideals as role models, but it was years before he was able to find a way to consistently live out the values he admired.

As a young boy, Flynn lived with his mother and her abusive husband, neither of whom could read or write. Flynn notes that being illiterate means his family members hold onto certain stories and have few ways to gain more knowledge about the world. He was sent to live with his father and, later, with his father's brother, who did not keep his promise to see that Flynn was educated. To add tragedy to disappointment, one of the author's younger brothers became ill and died after going in search of Flynn.

Flynn does not hide the fact that he reached points of desperation, and one of these moments came when he snatched a woman's purse. He also admits that he lied on various occasions. One of his lies netted him a job that he was not qualified to fulfill, and he and his family paid a heavy price for this lie.

Employment can be precarious in Jamaica. Although Flynn grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and eventually learned to write, he states that, at times, he was treated like a slave. For instance, an employer once loaned him out to work for someone else with no talk of compensation. In other instances, he was dismissed from a job for misbehavior or for flimsy reasons.

As Jamaica became a more popular tourist destination, Flynn sought employment in Montego Bay. He saw opportunity in the tourist industry and became a tour guide. One tourist

takes a great interest in him and the two have a long affair, which she underwrites.

Later, the author meets another tourist, but this time the meeting leads to marriage and stability. Flynn immigrates to the United States to join his wife, and prospers as a skilled machine operator, despite the fact that he had no formal training.

Flynn chose a fitting title for his memoir, one that echoes his path from an impoverished life in Jamaica to a more comfortable one in America. In *A Checkered Path to Destiny*, he openly examines his life's triumphs and failures. The book reads more like a set of recollections than a polished memoir, but it is interesting nonetheless. Flynn's story underscores the importance of literacy and demonstrates that it is possible to rise up from poverty, although it is no easy feat.

Jada Bradley