Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

A Dream, a Goal, Never a Reality: A True Story of Superior Movement
Stanley Ratliff
AuthorHouse
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Two Stars (out of Five)

A Dream, A Goal, Never a Reality by Stanley Ratliff is a memoir about being young, chasing dreams, and playing music.

Ratliff's book is a chronological memoir about the author and five of his friends who tried to break into the music business in the 1970s and 1980s. Their group, Superior Movement, toured near their hometown of Chicago for nearly two decades but failed to break into Motown and other music institutions. The band succumbed to weariness, dissension, and drug use. Ultimately, Ratliff ended up in jail after his friend Donnie tricked him in a bad drug deal. The band broke up while Ratliff was incarcerated, and the other band members now live fairly nondescript lives outside the music industry.

After serving his sentence, Ratliff, along with his wife, founded a ministry in Chicago, the Lawndale Community Church's Hope House Ministry, an addiction recovery and post-prison reintegration program.

The downfall of the band and the rebirth of the author are the most interesting parts of the book. Ratliff focuses the majority of his efforts on the day-to-day life of the band, leaving the downfall and rebirth until the last chapter. It's evident to the reader that nostalgia, rather than engaging storytelling, drives this book. The book covers the disappointments of the band, from a forged telegram from Motown (an elaborate trick by a band member's girlfriend) to personality conflicts and switching out a group member when one doesn't show up to practice, but not much more.

It is clear from the very beginning of the story that the band faced significant challenges to success. "Oftentimes it was difficult to get things started, because some of the guys didn't feel that rehearsal was important," writes Ratliff. "They figured they could just go on stage and sound like angels." This makes it hard for the reader to fully invest in the band's musical vision

when it is clear from the first pages that the band members will not realize their dreams.

Ratliff includes black-and-white photographs in the book, but, while they are an endearing representation of Superior Movement, the image quality is not good. Ratliff's writing is clear and easy to understand, but it has an unpolished quality that makes it sound more like a journal or someone speaking casually.

Ratliff has lived an interesting life, but with *A Dream, a Goal, Never a Reality*, he misses the opportunity to fully engage readers in his story. This memoir will most likely appeal to people who, like the author, pursued a career in music at a young age and have since moved through those trials to a life outside of music.

Melissa Wuske