Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

A Marked Heart
David George Ball
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Determining one's purpose in life is often difficult. In *A Marked Heart*, David Ball recounts his lifelong struggle to make peace between his Christian upbringing and his desires for secular success and influence. Beginning with his childhood in Britain, Ball includes details of daily life as the son of a Baptist minister and zealous missionary as well as accounts of German bombing raids on his city during World War II. He traces his voyage to America to attend Moody Bible Institute, Yale, and then Columbia Law School, followed by careers as a corporate officer and a government administrator who advocates for the widespread adoption of the 401(k) retirement investment mechanism.

While at Yale, Ball meets Martin Luther King, Jr.; it is a pivotal moment in the young student's life. King, writes Ball, "inspired [him] to help make the world a better place." For Ball, his education and work lead him to believe that he could not "help everybody, but maybe [he could] help working Americans in their pursuit of happiness by creating more financial security in their retirement." The pull between a greater spiritual calling instilled in him as a child and the various duties of daily life are recounted poignantly. Though not the course imagined by his mother, Ball shows that his chosen life returned him to deep faith and helped millions of Americans.

Ball's memoir reads like a captivating novel. He writes in the present tense, at times employing endearing personal descriptions, such as "Standing by the bedroom door in my pajamas, I shiver in a cold draft. I pray for Mum, but she seems far away." The chronological organization interlaces his career and personal life as they unfold with little foreshadowing or retrospective commentary on events as they occur. People come alive on the page with excerpts from letters and quoted conversations, including one in which he receives this advice: "Many men really take off once they discover their real interests in life."

America is repeatedly presented as a land that provides untold opportunities for those who work hard. It is a land, he believes, where success and failure are based on personal choice and responsibility. At the same time, he demonstrates that an Ivy League education, powerful connections, and exemplary work do not guarantee career success, family happiness, or personal fulfillment. The accounts of senseless power plays and personal sacrifices that accompany high-level careers in corporations and the federal government serve as a warning. As a committed Christian, the author explores his evolving faith and its varying role in his life. Ball's ability to overcome adversity with faith and support from family, friends, and former colleagues is an inspiring story.

While advocating for 401(k) retirement accounts was not his original idea for a lifelong mission to improve the lives of others, Ball has written an inviting memoir that reminds readers that they, too, can make a difference in the world.

C. William Gee