Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

ALONE!
Anonymous
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Newborn babies face uncertain futures, but those born to couples who would rather not be parents have the added stigma of feeling unwanted. The parents may try to become a family, but more often they split up, find new partners, and fail to give the child the attention he or she needs to thrive.

The anonymous author of *ALONE!* experienced such a beginning in 1960s England. Although his young mother and father married, they stayed together for only a few years. After his mother's second marriage, he moved with her and his step-father to Canada and the United States, where he spent his teenage years. Here, the author relates, in chronological order, events in his life and links these occurrences to popular music, television shows, and movies of the time. The author suffers from obsesseve compulsive disorder, evident from dialogue and lyrics he frequently references and detailed descriptions of data compiled for his book about videos and compact discs.

The author addresses his reading audience directly before several pivotal chapters. In the first instance, he wonders how his decisions, if made differently, might have affected future outcomes. At age ten, he enjoys a seat assignment next to a classmate named Joan, who seems to encourage his attention. Then his teacher abruptly changes the classroom seating and tells him that Joan requested it because she felt "crowded" by him. Eager to understand how he misread the girl's motives, he asks his mother who dismisses the incident by saying, "Oh, I wouldn't worry about it dear. She's obviously got problems."

As a young adult, the author meets Lori. Their friendship flourishes, and they discover their mutual status as virgins. She suggests they change that on the night of her eighteenth birthday. Oddly, instead of staying with her at her birthday party, he leaves to give his flat mate a tour of his work facility. When he returns, Lori has gone off to satisfy her birthday wish with

someone else. When hearing her new lover brag about his conquest, the author writes, “Straight away I knew what he was talking about…I felt like I was going to be sick.”

The author’s struggles continue unresolved over the next twenty years, marked by periods of depression and suicide attempts. He continues to try, without success, to find steady employment, get his finances in order, and attract a girlfriend. Concluding that complete isolation is the only way to avoid repeated failures at social interactions that reduce him to suicidal thoughts, he writes, “With my head buried deep in the sand…I was no longer a danger to myself.” Other clichés, such as “unfit mother,” and “build a mental wall,” mar this and other narrative passages.

The book’s dark cover with the title written in greenish-yellow letters suggests the author’s hopelessness, though occasional twists of humor offer relief to this bleak account. Repeated and incorrect word usage, such as “wasn’t she was” and “people up to know,” are evident in the text. In addition, stilted dialogue, particularly in conversations among teenagers, fails to enliven verbal interchanges.

Despite these shortcomings, *ALONE!* provides insight into how a person’s early negative experiences can seriously compromise one’s ability to forge healthy relationships and a productive life.

Margaret Cullison