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Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Angel of the Flesh
Vickie Walber
Polly Crawford
CreateSpace
Softcover $14.95 (320pp)
978-1-4681-9854-6
★★★★☆
(Apr 21, 2012)

Vickie Walber, with the help of Polly Crawford, a freelance writer, wrote *Angel of The Flesh*, a memoir that spans three profoundly dysfunctional decades of Walber's life. In explicit and often difficult to read detail, the book documents physical, mental, and sexual abuse Walber suffered from the time of her earliest memories until she was thirty-four years old. As she matured, the nature of her suffering shifted to self-inflicted pain in the form of drug and alcohol abuse as well as poor decision making that sometimes led to violence.

Walber's parents were alcoholic, negligent, depraved, and sadistic; that Walber and her three siblings survived beyond their pale childhoods seems a miracle in itself. The litany of atrocities Walber was subjected to (from birth, apparently) is numbing and unfathomable. From daily beatings and the bizarre indignity of cleaning up her mother's vomit at four years old, through being raped by farmhands and thrown by her father into a well, where she nearly died of hypothermia, the horrors ceased for only brief periods in the ensuing years.

On her own at fifteen, Walber met Celeste, a runaway, and the two became inseparable friends. They initially tried the hardscrabble life of low-end jobs, but soon discovered they could make money and sustain some personal autonomy as strippers. The pair experienced several years of financial success and minor celebrity. In fact, a Hollywood movie, *The Fifth Floor*, was made about ninety freakish days Walber spent in a mental institution.

Angel of The Flesh is very well-written with few errors. The dialogue feels realistic and the characters are developed nicely. Walber's narrative of the 1960s counterculture, the stripper subculture, and the oil-boom years in Alaska are all excellent slices of Americana.

Unfortunately, *Angel of The Flesh* ends on an odd and uncomfortable note. At thirty-four, Walber's life had deteriorated to a drug habit that cost her several hundred dollars a day, forcing her to turn to prostitution to support her addiction. Depressed and existentially troubled, Walber commences a scathing diatribe against God and puts a gun in her mouth. She has a sudden and complete spiritual healing that also leads to the healing of Celeste and several others.

A short epilogue focuses on the capture of a serial killer who targeted strippers and allegedly killed several women Walber knew. This out-of-place epilogue and absence of any information about Walber's subsequent life is disconcerting and will likely leave readers frustrated and disappointed.

Patty Sutherland