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Autobiography & Memoir

Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead
Frank Meeink
Jody M. Roy
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Frank Meeink once fit the American neo-Nazi archetype perfectly: he had the convictions, the clothes, the swastika tattoo, and the knack for perpetrating violence that have made this underground culture infamous. Surprisingly, today he's an anti-racism advocate, touring speaker, and author of the insightful *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead*.

The phrasing of this title may lead some readers to instantly connect Meeink's story with accounts of substance abuse and addiction, and they would be right to do so; the influence of drugs and alcohol on this narrative is paramount. With the guidance of his co-author, Dr. Jody M. Roy (an academic whose research on hate-motivated violence led her to his door), Meeink explores step four of his recovery: he takes an inventory of everything from his childhood experiences through the final resolution of his journey to become an active parent of his own children.

The book is ruthlessly honest, in part because of Meeink's personal stake in finding the truth; there is something brutal and encouraging about the depth and detail to which he is willing to expose his life to readers' examination. He never sounds preachy or self-pitying, but instead casts aside his ego to explore the damage he caused, with the hope of helping others prevent similar catastrophes.

Backed by vigorous academic research into the facts of the story, including the use of official records and interviews with past associates, *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead* is an important resource. The episodes of violence described herein, whether perpetrated by or on Meeink (and his story is rife with examples of both), are vivid and alarming. Readers gain insight into the thoughts and emotions experienced by a violent offender during the commission of his crimes in a raw, unromantic form. There is nothing to admire in these acts, and Meeink knows it; he describes his teen years like a doctor that needs to examine each cell in a cancer

before destroying it.

Readers will likely develop admiration for Meeink, however, because of the reconciliation he has found through anti-hate advocacy; and more specifically, because of his ability to consciously choose and live a life based on love instead.

Anyone wishing to better understand their own role in the struggle for peaceful cohabitation between individuals and groups will benefit from reading this book. Through it, Meeink lays bare the ways he was made vulnerable to the teachings of racial division and white supremacy, the ways he recruited others to his young army, and the conditions under which he began to disown it all.

Patty Comeau