Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Beamish Boy: (I am not my story): A Memoir of Recovery and Awakening
Albert Flynn DeSilver
The Owl Press
978-0-9669430-9-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

An accomplished poet, photographer, and owner of The Owl Press in California, Albert Flynn DeSilver grew up “with bats in the belfry” in his 1900 Dutch colonial clocktower home in New Canaan, Connecticut. While his architect father chased the bats with a tennis racket and his socialite mother sucked on her “ciggies” and sipped her endless martinis, a German governess, Miss Hedy, “a female Grendel from Beowulf,” terrorized young Albert and his two older sisters, Serena and Margaret. His experience growing up under the “wrath of Miss Hedy,” and “the inexplicable emotional distance from [his] parents,” left permanent emotional and psychological scars and provide the substance for DeSilver’s fascinating poetic memoir of his recovery and rehabilitation.

In twenty-one chapters of four sections, DeSilver reveals his detailed recollections of a troubled childhood, a rage-filled adolescence, an alcohol and drug-addicted adulthood, and a lengthy period of recovery and transformation through his poetry, photography, and stable and unstable relationships that ended with his realization that “my only ambition, my only reason for being, is to love.”

As fans of Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky* will know, a “beamish boy” is one “beaming and bright with optimism, promise or achievement.” And readers with an interest in learning how a recovering addict battles his demons and remains optimistic will appreciate DeSilver’s wit and wisdom through it all. His inspirational story, as tragic as it is at times, never wallows in self-pity. He is open and honest and freely revealing of his missteps, his alienation from his parents, and his life-long terror of Miss Hedy. He provides graphic details of his addiction and his periods of therapy and attendant hallucinations. He recounts his failed attempts at love and his self-loathing over the rape of a girlfriend that he believes he could have prevented. There are several scenes of self-deprecating humor and one of major exuberance when he finds his true

love, Marian, whom he married. And there is a heart-wrenching, tear-welling poignancy in his description of the week-long dying of his father in a hospital room with “wallpaper peeling like sheets of blackened lead.”

Due to his six published volumes of poetry, one expects to find his love of words manifested in such descriptions as, “Mom’s perfume was the perfume of parties, of travelling, of leaving the house. It was the smell of distance.” Of Miss Hedy, he says,” She practically wore a can of Lysol spray on her hip in a holster,” Even his chapter titles sing.

Hopefully, DeSilver’s published book will be graced with some black and white photos of family and friends, and full-color photos of his own work, especially from his psychedelic period. Over all, *Beamish Boy* is a good, solid read, a unique portrayal of an individual who has lived an interesting life and survived its many downs to come out on top.

M. Wayne Cunningham