

Believing the Unbelievable: Surviving the Cruelty of the Christian Brothers Regime

Benjamin Franklin

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The cruel and inhumane tactics employed by the infamous Christian Brothers in Ireland are recounted in this gripping and emotional firsthand account from one of the victims.

Author Benjamin Franklin relates his harrowing life story beginning with his fifth birthday when the troubles erupted. The author lost his mother at a very young age and was left at the St. Joseph's Industrial School in Glin County Limerick when his father traveled to England for work. Franklin left the school at fifteen having suffered ten years of abuse at the hands of the now notorious Christian Brothers a group home organization founded in Waterford Ireland. The group is known for its abuse accusations and recently made a public apology. Today Franklin continues to struggle with the lasting effects of the sexual and physical abuse and intolerable acts committed against both him and his younger brother.

Franklin's heartbreaking story reads like a fictional tale from Roddy Doyle or Jan Banville. But this saga is real or at least as real as Franklin's memory will allow. Unfortunately because the story is told exclusively from the author's memories there are many questions left unanswered about why events unfolded as they did.

The book's biggest downfall is that Franklin's writing skills are not as strong as his memories and the prose suffers from numerous grammatical errors and unclear statements. While it is not hard to understand what Franklin is telling his readers a solid re-write of the book by an experienced ghostwriter would surely clean things up and create the stirring account that Franklin wishes to tell.

Nevertheless the story is a truly captivating and earth-shattering account of what went on inside the Christian Brothers regime. Acts of violence perpetrated on youths including an intensely raw scene in which Franklin is beaten by the Superior for stealing food are brought to light for the first time here. This fact makes the book one that demands to be read. There is an underlying triumph in the story because of the fact that Franklin has survived and reformed his life. He was able to relate his past and that is surely worthy of attention. With a strong edit and clear re-write the story could become even more powerful and offer a raw and honest voice that will connect with readers.

LIAM BRENNAN (August 14, 2008)

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