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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Black and Confused in the UK 53/60

Dubes 52
Xlibris (Nov 17, 2011)
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When Dubes 52 meets his parents in London for the first time since they left him and his younger brother with family in the West Indies, they seem like strangers. He is understandably reluctant to accept their affection. But a new life is calling, one of school, friends, girlfriends, work, and eventually his own family. As recorded in *Black and Confused in the UK 53/60*, Dubes 52 does his best to rise to the challenges.

Dubes 52 encounters more than his fair share of violence and racism during his school years, though he readily admits that some of the trouble that came his way was his own fault. His passion for pranks almost gets him into violent situations on several occasions, as when he and his friends set off explosives in an apartment building and they nearly get caught in an elevator.

In addition to trouble of his own making, Dubes 52 is subjected to several instances of bigotry, the most extreme of which involves being taken in for questioning about a crime in which he had no hand. While the episode turned out positively for Dubes 52, the obvious racism left him feeling angry and vulnerable: “Three of them entered my confines, along with one additional chap like a former wrestler called Giant Haystack; it was only a miracle that I did not crap my underwear with expectation of inflicting pain.”

The author’s five children may appreciate the legacy their father intends to leave for them, but a wider audience might find his prose too strenuous. Dubes 52 uses language that at times feels very formal but is never easy to digest, in part because the sentences are often awkward and occasionally grammatically incorrect.

Dubes 52 should be commended for attempting to write about a unique time and place—London in the 1960s, ’70s, and ‘80s—but the memoir tends to focus on very personal anecdotes that don’t offer any fresh information about the setting in which they take place. His stories feel as if they could happen anywhere, in any decade.

Family and friends make up the bulk of the characters, and it is obvious that Dubes 52 values these people both on and off the page. The glimpses of the characters are brief, however, too brief for readers to get a full understanding of why they matter. For example, the author had five children but includes very few stories about their childhoods or adulthoods. Readers are treated to more details about pranks pulled in the office than they are to any characteristics of the author’s children.

Dubes 52 might attract a larger audience for his memoir if he expanded his vision and simplified his language. His life could be an example of overcoming tribulation for young people who struggle with feelings of disconnect and alienation.

ANDI DIEHN (September 6, 2012)

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