

Bobby's Trials

Bobby Wilson

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The average high school graduate looks forward to college, time with friends, and those last carefree days of youth before meeting the demands of adulthood. Eighteen-year-old Bobby Wilson faced a murder trial instead.

In Bobby's Trials, Wilson tells his own story of being charged with the 1963 murders of his mother and sister and the decade of legal and emotional limbo that followed. His memoir is by turns disturbing and uplifting, detailing an extremely difficult childhood and drawing attention to injustices in life and law as well as the strength of the human spirit.

When Bobby's father abandoned the family, his mother began a long descent into apparent madness. Her bitter view of men as "those bastards" extended to her own son; "You're a bastard just like your father," she told him. Her fear of abandonment resulted in paranoia and unpredictable behavior, and her cruelty and neglect of her two children are illustrated by events in Bobby's early childhood that paint a picture of a woman who was likely suffering from an undiagnosed and serious mental illness.

Throughout his unsettled childhood, Bobby managed to parent both himself and his sister. He learned to earn his own money, took charge of his own education, and even put food on the table. His efforts were largely unappreciated by his mother, and plans for a brighter future were soon shattered by tragedy.

On June 19, 1963, Bobby woke to the sound of his mother's crazed rantings and the barrel of a gun in his face. He came to outside his burning home some time later, with no memory of the events in between. What follows is an example of the legal system at its worst, during the pre-Miranda days when a young man could be jailed and questioned without representation, denied basic human rights, and convicted in the press. Over the course of three trials and ten years, Bobby managed to hold on to his strength and sanity when the odds seemed insurmountable. He continuously reached for the life he deserved, eventually going to law school so that he could defend those in similar situations and try to effect change in a much-flawed legal system. Now a law professor and private investigator, he is currently working on a book about his various cases from his years as a trial lawyer.

Bobby's Trials is captivating in its honesty and candor, evoking reader sympathy and compassion. A few grammatical errors, misspellings, and the unusual font choice don't detract from the overall tone of the book; more distracting is the author's choice to refer to his mother and sister as "Mother" and "Sister" rather than using their names (which are mentioned at the end of the book). This creates an unfortunate distance for the reader in a story that would be better served by a more intimate approach. Even so, Bobby's Trials remains a gripping memoir that illustrates an extraordinary young man's ability to not only survive but triumph over unimaginable adversity. A worthy read.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (May 18, 2010)

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