



Born Into Fire: The Autobiography of Mick Haines

Mick Haines

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“Find a job that you love and you’ll never work a day in your life” is an old saying that Mick Haines lives by. *Born Into Fire* is the story of this self-described “normal chap” and his life as a firefighter. Although less than a third of the book focuses on fighting fires, it is still an enjoyable read for anyone who has ever dreamed of being a firefighter.

The autobiography opens with a charming description of Haines’s childhood in England in the 1960s, recalling such evocatively named places as Watery Lane, Ham Cottage, and Number 1 Sunny Bank; in the latter locale a rope ladder hung from a window of Haines’s boyhood bedroom. From there, he takes the reader along on his five years of service in the British Army, relating stories of training and tours of duty in Germany and Northern Ireland and recollecting adventures from barroom brawls (“infantry soldiers like to fight”) to ski trips. After mustering out and then working at a paper mill for four years, Haines realized that he wanted more out of life, perhaps “something that involved blue flashing lights.”

The heart of the memoir is the author’s life as a firefighter. Sections describe the extensive training and conditioning recruits must endure; and readers will relish his stories about fighting chimney fires and rescuing “a cat up a tree.” Haines tells of conflagrations in which there was “no sense wasting water” and instead he and his fellow firefighters had to “get in and pull the thing apart,” even as flames roared around them.

This is exciting stuff. Unfortunately, there is not enough of it to satisfy those looking for a solid firefighting story. Haines devotes perhaps too much of the book to his other passion in life: walking. Extensive diary entries cover his time ambling along Hadrian’s Wall, traversing the length of The Pennines (“the backbone of England”), and walking coast to coast across the south of England.

Haines also provides glimpses into his love life and his two failed marriages. Fortunately, he does eventually come back to the subject of fighting fires, and he ends with some good stories about how the British firefighters train in the long tunnel beneath the English Channel.

Haines admits that he “laughed his head off” while writing many parts of his memoir. Most readers will get little more than a chuckle out of these snippets. The book is liberally illustrated with photos, but most are of the women, pets, and places in his life. The few photos of firefighters are all posed portraits, and none show the men suited up in firefighting kit.

Born Into Fire is a nice read, but it is not the dramatic story of a firefighter that most who readers pick up this book might expect it to be.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (November 28, 2012)

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