Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Brain Teasers & Heart Pleasers: Grin and Bear It
Calvin Bowden
BookSurge
978-1-4392-3562-1
Four Stars (out of Five)

The essays in this often amusing and consistently enjoyable book are a testament to a long life well lived. Calvin Bowden writes about everything from the Depression to World War II, from being dirt poor to the three professions a man should avoid—"probation officer, preacher, and fiction writer."

Bowden's writing is folksy, informal, and down to earth, all of which gives Brain Teasers & Heart Pleasers a certain unvarnished charm. The book is laden with philosophical musings that can bring a smile to the reader's face, as when he writes, "If being born poor was a crime, I'd be serving life. I wouldn't be lonesome either, because God likes poor folks. I know He does because he made so many of us."

Readers share in the memories of Bowden's past as a poor boy serving his country in the military, the bittersweet reminiscences of a class reunion, the trials and tribulations of keeping pigs and chickens, and a humorous story of singing at Christmastime. There is an in-depth look at Grandpa's place and some words of wisdom about "things older guys shouldn't do."

Sometimes Bowden takes readers back to simpler days gone by; life on a farm is a frequent theme. Other times, the author tackles serious contemporary issues, like in his insightful discussion of crime. Bowden not only has a discerning eye for detail, but his turns of phrase can be laugh-out-loud funny. In describing a certain road, he writes, "it must have been laid out by a drunken road engineer riding a cross-eyed burro." As for being a writer of fiction, Bowden laments, "your time would be better spent riding around the country on a sleepy mule without a saddle fighting crows in the melon patch with a short stick."

Brain Teasers & Heart Pleasers is essentially a collection of unrelated short essays, but Bowden's way with words makes each a self-contained little gem, both entertaining and thought-provoking. The book is also well designed with attractive headings and large type that is easy to

read, but it could have benefited from a thorough proofreading—there are far too many typographical errors.

Brain Teasers & Heart Pleasers is a delight to read. With his wizened perspective honed over decades, and a sense of humor that has likely sustained him through the worst of times, Calvin Bowden is a plain, unadulterated country philosopher worthy of attention.

Barry Silverstein