Clarion Review

Family & Relationships

By His Own Blood
John Montandon
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Currently, the chance of being infected with HIV through a blood transfusion is almost nonexistent. Because of stringent blood screenings put in place in March 1985 and strengthened in the 1990s, a patient's risk of infection is now roughly one in 1.5 million, according to the US Centers for Disease Control. Before these screenings were required, however, close to 5,000 people in the United Sates developed HIV and AIDS after receiving infected blood during a medical procedure. Retired Texas cotton farmer Doc Montandon was one of them.

Doc's family received the news in 1989, four years after Doc had undergone exploratory surgery for what doctors thought was a malignant liver tumor. As John Montandon poignantly and powerfully relates in *By His Own Blood*, the news that his father had AIDS was "the worst I could have ever imagined… . Worse than him dying."

Part of Montandon's devastation came from the fact that in the 1980s, myth and misinformation about AIDS were far more widespread than truth and fact. Fear reigned, causing people like Doc to be shunned even by many in the medical community. "When the ER doctor looked at his charts, he told Mama they couldn't admit Daddy and basically told them to get out. Mama said she was so confused and didn't know what to do."

The disease caused not just Doc's body to waste away but bits of his family's spirit as well. Montandon vividly recalls the struggle: "The strain of giving Mama a report each time I returned to the apartment, plus the recurring haunt that she might also have AIDS, was taking an immense toll on us all. Finally, Daddy slipped into a coma. It was a relief to see him at ease."

By His Own Blood is a compelling, loving tribute. Montandon remembers Doc as a good man, a man who always rooted for the underdog, who believed manners were important, who advised his children to listen more than talk because they would learn more that way.

For a novice writer, Montandon does a terrific job relating his family's experiences.

Photos of Doc and his family add authenticity to the book. The prose flows smoothly, and Montandon uses loving details to bring his family and everyone else to life on the page. Sadly, the acknowledgements and prologue, as written, make the book feel more like someone bearing witness than writing a professionally crafted memoir. A writer should not feel the need to explain why he is writing; the story should make that clear.

Recognized at the Los Angeles Book Festival, Montandon's memoir reminds readers that hurt can be followed by healing. *By His Own Blood* is an inspiring and insightful debut.

Cindy Wolfe Boynton