Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Coming Clean from Abilene: All the way to Austin
Bob Mayfield
CreateSpace
978-1-4848-2741-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

Clear and compelling, author's prose is as comfortable as an easy chair that allows you to sink in and then silently wills you to "Stay. Relax. Enjoy."

Bob Mayfield's autobiography is dedicated to "everyone who enjoys telling stories," which clearly includes Mayfield himself. *Coming Clean from Abilene: All the way to Austin* recounts the first few decades of the Texas-based geographer's life. It opens with a Depression-era photograph of a toddler, hands raised and active as he speaks. Even without the caption "Telling my first tale," this photo, along with the first few pages of the text, makes it clear that Mayfield is a born storyteller.

Clear and compelling, Mayfield's prose is as comfortable as an easy chair that allows you to sink in and then silently wills you to "Stay. Relax. Enjoy." Told in a conversational tone that is no doubt as friendly as Mayfield himself, the book takes the reader from when he is a freckled adolescent who is "addicted to Saturday movies" to when, as a father of four, he returns to his alma mater, Texas Christian University, to become chair of the geography department.

Like Charles Dickens, after whom he was named Robert "Charles," Mayfield provides strong, vivid settings for all of his tales. He takes the reader to Calcutta, New Delhi, Bombay, and other bright, incensed locations in India as he performs the field work needed for his PhD. There, he and his bride, Loraine, are guided by a high school-aged Bihari, who is as eager to learn English as Mayfield is to learn Hindi.

Mayfield weaves together scenes infused with the same delight he surely felt living them, bringing the reader on a journey as diverse as the regions the author studied. One can almost see Mayfield smile as he talks about small, but significant, moments that have become favorite memories, such as when he was one of four American geographers selected to attend

the Regional Conference of Southeast Asian Geographers in Malaysia in 1962.

The trip to Asia included a stay at the renowned Raffles Hotel in Singapore, a hotel he had visited several years earlier and describes as “the kind of place that Somerset Maugham might describe in one of his novels.” The details he includes about the hotel’s look and feel are enough to make the moment a treat. But then he adds the kicker: the realization that sitting with him in the lounge, just a few tables away, is Somerset Maugham, who seems “to enjoy paying no attention to us, whatever.”

As the artwork on the cover implies, the last several chapters of this book focus on Mayfield’s return to the United States and, eventually, his beloved Texas. By then, he is the father of two sons and two daughters. But he indicates that, in many respects, his life has just begun. In fact, at the end, he says, “As one of A. E. Lee’s old comic book characters used to say, things were about to get interesting.”

Missing from the book is a much-needed table of contents. Still, *Coming Clean From Abilene* is a trip down memory lane written by a good storyteller. It will appeal most to those who know the author or who have traveled a similar path.

Cindy Wolfe Boyton