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Autobiography & Memoir

Confessions of a Horseshoer
Ron Tatum
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A title beginning “Confessions of … ” immediately conjures thoughts of a dishy, tell-all written by a female with a score to settle. So when the last word of the title is “horseshoer,” readers are caught off guard. But those whose curiosity compells them to turn the first page of this book will be rewarded with every subsequent page.

Tatum is a horseshoer and a college professor. His voice is just as smart and folksy as one would hope and readers will feel like they’re chatting with him in front of his fireplace.

The tone of the writing is informative, with a welcoming honesty, just nostalgic enough without being sentimental—all of which make it a rare find in the typically self-serving memoir market. The book follows Tatum from his boyhood with a tough dad to the Marines to a career in education, all the while helping readers learn the life of horseshoing.

Tatum answers questions like “What should a horseshoer wear?” and “What do wild horses do to protect their hooves?” He also explains more personal matters such as why he doesn’t have horses himself, why he won’t shoe friends’ horses, and why he doesn’t normally like talking about his profession. The author also reveals to readers the most common topic of conversation amidst shoers: their most challenging horses. His lessons about life and the impermanence of problems during the eight-week shoeing cycle are particularly powerful.

Readers watch and learn from Tatum’s relationships with humans and animals alike, as well as his thoughts on horse and human injury, as he shares wit and wisdom from nearly forty years on the job. They’ll learn the tools of the trade, but, more importantly, they’ll recognize the impressive care and service that permeates the profession. Tatum’s stories exhibit a quiet, lilting sense of humor, and while those focused on ranch life seem to wander a little off topic, his voice is so enjoyable it doesn’t matter.

Confessions of a Horseshoer is engaging and offers readers an intelligently down-home look at a profession—and lifestyle—most people know nothing about.

Melissa Wuske