



Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Cracker Justice: A Real-Life Legal Thriller

Ron Dahly

Ronald E. Dahly

978-1-5023-9865-9

Four Stars (out of Five)

For those who fear being trapped in the quicksand of a draconian legal system, Dahly's unrelenting flow of travails is cautionary but educational.

Trapped in a swamp of bureaucracy, politics, and personal animosity, Ron Dahly faced trumped-up charges for abuse and financial fraud. The facts as they are related in *Cracker Justice: A Real-Life Legal Thriller* make Dahly a believable narrator who is dogged in pursuit of justice, and saved by his own hard work and the aid of a generous attorney.

A widower from the Northeast, Dahly was experienced in hospitality management when he took a position in Florida as the executive director of Wheelhouse, a facility serving people with cerebral palsy. The organization's long-time former director, supported by local religious groups, began to resent Dahly's changes and secular focus. Soon, what started as a philosophical difference became personal, and bureaucrats with unknown agendas began to interfere. Dahly was forced to resign his position to defend himself in court against charges of abuse, neglect, and financial fraud—a struggle that bankrupted him.

His story is complicated and covers much of the 1990s. The book opens with Dahly's second trial approaching, one in which he's charged with misuse of Medicaid funds. The narrative then moves into an effective flashback, the author relating how he was charged with, and found innocent of, abuse. Whether through a bureaucratic power grab or because of some personal acrimony, two mid-level bureaucrats with Florida's Department of Children and Families are the catalysts for the author's troubles. Dahly pulls no punches: he names Wheelhouse staff, bureaucrats, politicians, and even residents, providing an index of people and their positions, with only a few granted anonymity. The parade of names can be confusing, but multiple court and hearing transcripts lend veracity to the story.

One attorney comes across poorly: Gil Colon Jr., who successfully defended Dahly in his first trial. Colon later took a five-thousand-dollar retainer to defend Dahly on the fraud charge, did little if any work, resigned from the case, and kept the retainer, according to Dahly. For the most part, though, Dahly makes few personal attacks, relying instead on his ability to use colorful terms to get his point across, as when he describes one person who “slithered out of the courtroom as quickly as he could.”

Dahly is a competent writer. He acknowledges those who believed in him, especially his second wife and his father, both of whom supported him financially. For those who fear being trapped in the quicksand of an indifferent bureaucracy or facing trial in a draconian legal system, Dahly’s unrelenting flow of travails is worrisome but educational. Even though his near-decade-long “trial by falsehood” cost him tens of thousands of dollars, his emotional health, and his desire to devote his work life to a worthy cause, Dahly has done a service by sharing this cautionary tale.

Gary Presley