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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Crossroads: A Teenage Soldier in World War II

Charles Samuel Betts
AuthorHouse
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Crossroads: A Teenage Soldier in World War II has a misleading subtitle. The story begins with Charles Bettendorf as a teenage soldier in World War II, but most of Charles Samuel Betts' book chronicles his life after the war.

There are obvious similarities between the author and the protagonist, starting with their names, professions, and hometowns, giving every appearance of a thinly veiled autobiography. Perhaps it is not, but then the author should have put much more distance between himself and his main character.

A novel presumes a plot shaped by a character's goals and frustrations, successes, and failures. In *Crossroads*, Charles succeeds at everything. At 19, he is a private. At 21, he is a major. He decides to study Japanese and is quickly fluent. When he becomes a doctor, he is the best. Any problem he faces is resolved within one page. Without giving away too much detail, this trend continues into his sunset years. In other words, there is no compelling plot.

Charles Bettendorf is an admirable man, a member of the Greatest Generation, who leads a fascinating life. If he were to walk off the page and become real, readers would probably want to shake his hand. If Bettendorf is indeed Betts, the author should have written an autobiography instead.

While in some ways an engaging read, *Crossroads* suffers from a lack of editing. Near the end of the book, for example, readers learn that, "Sam Petrie and Jane died in 1997. Sam was 87." Two paragraphs later, "Sam and Jane Petrie would have been 85 in 2000. They had died in 1987."

It's difficult to get close to Betts's characters, because his book is more summary than yarn. Using mostly declarative sentences and hardly any dialogue, the story feels like a report. For instance, a love scene early in the book should have been romantic, but it was mechanical, noting the names of sex organs and how they fit together.

The author is a retired psychiatrist who has an abundance of fascinating knowledge that could be used to write a compelling novel, perhaps a family saga, but Bettendorf needs to be challenged more. His life looks too easy.
BOB SANCHEZ (June 2, 2011)

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