Clarion Review

General

Dead Man Waking
Peter Cropsey
CreateSpace
978-1-4538-0210-6
Four Stars (out of Five)

As a child, Eddie Wilkins was passed back and forth between divorced parents who did not have the time or the desire to raise him. He was neglected, and he was sexually and emotionally abused. Someone would occasionally drift into his life to care for him—a step-mother, a couple of school friends, for example—but no one ever stuck around. He was smoking pot before he was ten and using heroin by the time he was twelve. His life had no purpose, and he had no dreams beyond surfing, riding a motorcycle, and getting his next fix.

Dead Man Waking, by Peter Cropsey, is the story of Eddie's childhood. At the beginning of the book, the reader is introduced to an adult Eddie who rides with a motorcycle club, and commits whatever crimes are necessary to maintain his drug habit. One day, he loses control of his bike and crashes in a farmer's field. The farmer takes Eddie into his home and gives him some painkillers. Eddie takes fifteen pills at once, falls into a deep sleep, and dreams of his childhood and of the choices that led to his current situation. Eddie recalls the pain and the loss that he experienced as a child. He also remembers his first exposure to Christianity and his deep faith in the belief that God is always with him. When he wakes from his dream, the farmer is there with food and prayer, and Eddie's life is changed forever.

Dead Man Waking is a compelling book. The author draws on his personal experiences to create a story that is brutally honest. He describes the desperation of heroin addiction in terms that are both utterly repugnant and strangely poetic. For example, he writes of the moment when heroin first enters the blood stream: “I would push it firm and fast and within 3 seconds the wave of warmth and relief would cascade over me like hot honey. Sometimes I would wonder if this one was the one that would kill me. Sometimes I would hope so. I knew that I had sold out my whole life to the king slave driver, this malevolent demon of demoralization that had a death grip on me 24 hours a day.”

Cropsey is fearless in sharing this story, and thus paints a very clear picture of all that Eddie has gone through. The writing is occasionally rough, and on several occasions the narrative is halted and the author offers lessons on cowboys, Romans, and the history of drug use. Despite this, the book is quite good and will be deeply meaningful to some readers. In the end, there is a sense that, through the power of faith and God’s love, he is not without hope.

Catherine Thureson