ForeWord Reviews

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

Fortitude: True Stories of True Grit
Malinda Teel, editor
Red Rock Press
978-0-9669573-7-2
(November 2000)

“Nineteen years old, married six months to a dairy farmer, and five months pregnant, I was hiding in a feed room, as a cow was being stabbed with a pitchfork. The blood was running in rivulets down her legs, making puddles around her hooves. My husband was teaching her-and me-a lesson.” This is Karen’s story, entitled “Like Leaping Off a Mountain.” A midwestern farm wife, she describes her eleven years with a verbally abusive husband, and how, with courage and the support of family, she overcame her situation.

It’s one of thirty-seven, mostly first-person essays, in this compilation that describes brushes with adversity. Divided into eight sections covering topics ranging from war and sports to tribulations with illness, schooling, and other people, these personal accounts are-as intended-often moving. A single military mom having to leave her three young children unsupervised on Christmas Day while she works, a husky eleven-year-old football player who doesn’t really want to play the game at all but who also doesn’t want to hurt his Dad’s feelings, and a thirty-six-year-old man who “had drunk away my last job,” are just some of the personalities facing their demons.

Brief biographies of each author follow their stories, some of which were previously printed in other publications. From the serious (a victim of rape, a woman born with cerebral palsy) to the not-so-serious (a dog bite, potty-training a three-year-old), Teel has put together a collection of thought-provoking glimpses into other people's lives when they're at their darkest. Sometimes the humor shines through. In "Love in the Land of Loss," the author relates how she lost her fiancé to a heart attack two weeks before their wedding. A few years later she began dating a man whom she was deeply interested in. "'So,' I said casually, on one of our first dates. 'Any incidence of heart problems in your family?'" Interspersed throughout are sidebars and epigrams adding perspective. Usually two pages in length, these touch on the same subject, but are more historical in nature, such as Father Damien and the leper colony on Molokai Island, Henry "Box" Brown and his escape from slavery, and the Matthew and Mae Bertha Carter family and integration in the heart of the Mississippi Delta.

Motivational quotes are also interspersed throughout the book.

Robin Farrell Edmunds