



From Bombs to Babies

R.L. Rackliffe

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'I feel the hand of God in what has happened to me so far. As a doctor, I could be of service to God by serving my fellow man.

That's exactly the way I feel too, Bob. Let's shake hands on that and pledge to each other that we will dedicate ourselves to his service.'

A firm warm handshake affirmed the pledge.

We stood there on that dirt road, overlooking Saipan's Magicienne Bay, and shook hands pledging ourselves to this worthwhile task. I felt as if my future had just been pointed out to me, and I'm sure George did, too.

It was good feeling.

-From *Bombs to Babies*, R.L. Rackliffe

To read the memoir of a man with the integrity, work ethic, and compassion of a man like R.L. Rackliffe makes one question their own personal credo. Even if the above passage is slightly exaggerated for literary effect (which is unlikely), pledging one's life to the service of God and medicine is honorable and no simple task. In this day and age where America seems to have traded freedom for security, personal responsibility for the blame game, forgiveness for the lawsuit, and common sense for political correctness, it is refreshing and spiritually uplifting that a man like Rackliffe, an unsung role-model of veracity, still exists. Readers should look upon Rackliffe's longevity and the fact that he has chosen to share his life's experiences as a blessing.

The Great Depression destroyed the comfortable and leisurely way of life the author and his family had when he was a child. He writes, "The year was 1927. My father, who had dazzled the city with his quick rise to wealth...served two terms in the state legislature...by that year [1927] the economy was in a downslide, heading towards the stock market crash of 1929...Ultimately, he lost everything." In 1928, when Rackliffe was around seven years old, his father began to make him a target of ridicule and abuse. He writes, "...my father really began to make me his whipping boy...it was terrible to bear, because I loved him, and it hurt like hell to have him mad at me." Later on, his father became a Christian and their relationship improved dramatically. Readers will find that unlike some memoirs that are dry and tedious, Rackliffe's style of writing is conversational, not anecdotal, and it puts readers at ease and eager not only to read more of his writing, but to actually sit down with the gentleman and have a conversation. His descriptions are so lucid that one feels as if they're experiencing life with him side by side. Not until the end of the memoir is there any sense of his life being part of history. Everything is vivid, and his recall is so lucid that when he describes his early days of advanced education, attempting pre-med at Springfield College, readers can smell the campus.

Though he joined the Army reserve in 1942 to keep from being drafted, World War II pre-empted Rackliffe from finishing college until after he was discharged. As part of the ground crew with the 73rd Bomb Wing, he was stationed on the island of Saipan in the Marianas. Being on Saipan was life-changing for Rackliffe and led to the quote above

where he vowed to become a doctor. Making good on his word, he married Jane, his high school sweetheart and got himself enrolled into med-school. After serving as an intern and resident and paying his dues, he became a pediatrician. His descriptions of childhood, time served in the army, the baptism of fire of becoming a doctor, practicing as a doctor, and having a family are all so well written that one is pulled into the gravitational field of his psyche to relive his trials, errors, and triumphs. His humility and compassion are so great that readers will look at the minuscule grammatical errors, awkward sentences and typos in the book as being part of the author's quaintness. Readers who enjoy Michael Crichton's book *Five Patients* will adore *From Bombs to Babies*.

LEE GORDON (April 26, 2011)

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