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From Outhouse to Outer Space

D. Jones
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From Outhouse to Outer Space by Ed D. Jones relates the story of the author's life, from poverty during the Depression, to his work on the lunar landing module. After Ed's father died in an accident when he was only a child, his mother married a man called Chili, who was often drunk and molested Ed. When Ed found him trying to molest his sister, he screamed at Chili and told his mother what was going on. Chili rolled up a blanket, handed it to Ed, and said, "I warned you. Now get out." On his own at the age of nine, Ed visited an Indian reservation and learned how to care for himself.

Ed served with the Merchant Marines, and his stories from this time are intriguing. He signed up after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and sailed on various ships as needed. One ship was sunk by torpedo. Another time, he fought in hand-to-hand combat with a Japanese sailor who had boarded their ship: "I had a pocket knife with a two inch blade and had it open and ready to use. When I thought the man was too close to use his gun I jumped out to grab him. I jumped too early and he swung his riffle and bayonet at me cutting my left shoulder real bad." Later, when another ship was attacked by planes, he was injured, taken prisoner on a Japanese ship, and tortured. With a few other men, he escaped when the Japanese ship was sunk, and was then sixty-five days adrift in the life raft.

It is certain that this volume has not been touched by a professional editor. The pages are a medium blue with dark blue letters, which sets off nicely the old family photographs, but makes it difficult to read. Misspellings, poor grammar, and the "voice of the back woods boy" abound with a charm reminiscent of Forrest Gump in its direct simplicity and rambling adventure, where we are never sure what lurks around the corner.

The search for Jones's mother is a gripping tale of adversity, adventure, self reliance, hard work, and graciously good people. But unfortunately, *From Outhouse to Outer Space* degenerates into the ordinary. An ongoing decline in the ability to hold readers' interest plagues the second half of the book. Jones relates his adventures in the Merchant Marines, then the less exciting service in Germany as the war was ending, various post-war assignments, and a rather mundane outline summary of the rest of his life. The first half of the book is material worthy of being written up as a screenplay, and rescues this volume from being no more than an average memoir to be treasured by his family. Read the second half at your own risk.
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