FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Hot Springs
Geoffrey Becker
Tin House Books
978-0-9820539-4-2
(January 31, 2010)

Filled with strangely dysfunctional people, this unusual novel careens from Baltimore to Colorado and back again as two women struggle over possession of five-year-old Emily. She is an out-of-wedlock child whose mother, Bernice, gave her up for adoption at birth. Although Bernice knew who the baby's father was, she never told him because "it didn't involve him." Emily has been raised by Tessa and David Harding, a devout Christian couple whose marriage is in trouble because David is having an affair with a woman who works in his dental office and uses his computer to view pornographic pictures.

Bernice decides she wants her daughter back and recruits Landis, another unsavory character, to drive to Colorado where she expects him to help abduct the precocious Emily. After a difficult journey, they carry out their nefarious plan and, shortly thereafter, split up. With difficulty, Bernice gradually makes her way back to Baltimore where she takes up residence in the house of her widower father. Tessa tracks down Bernice and pursues her to Baltimore where, in a gripping confrontation, she tries to reclaim her adopted daughter.

Elements of Bernice's difficulties as a child and as a young woman are revealed, helping to round out her portrait. As the plot unfolds, readers are inexorably drawn into the narrative and are compelled to keep reading to learn the ultimate outcome. Somehow in this sordid story, jazz music and musicians are introduced, although their contribution to the plot line is far from apparent.

The unpleasant characters presented here are well-drawn by author Geoffrey Becker, who teaches writing and directs the graduate program in professional writing at Towson University. Becker is the author of a novel, Bluestown, and two prize-winning collections of short stories, Dangerous Men and Black Elvis. He has been active in the music scene, playing guitar and performing both solo and in various bands.

In his latest offering, Becker demonstrates great skill in depicting distasteful characters

whose unhappy experiences are so morbidly fascinating and so bloated with perplexing uncertainty as to provide their own uniquely tainted attraction.