



Ice on My Wings

John Farron

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It's not easy to write an engaging book about depression, and it's even harder to write about depression in a humorous manner, but that is just what John Farron has done in his unexpectedly delightful memoir, *Ice on My Wings*. With a dark sense of humor, Farron provides a glimpse of his life as a Royal Air Force pilot who fought against being grounded by the insidious disease of depression.

Farron transports the reader to the scenes of his British boyhood. With evocative descriptions of a working-class neighborhood and a daily routine that included air raid warnings and bomb sheltering exercises, he also notes the occasional ice cream cornet and playing board games with old buttons for playing pieces. These scenes from the early 1940s take a boy's perspective, making them poignant without being overly sentimental. The older Farron looks back with a wink and a nod, noting that the foremost thought on his six-year-old mind when his father returned from war was not about reunion, but whether the contents of his father's baggage might hold a gift for him.

Not long after his father's return, Farron had his first, fleeting, experience of depression, which he calls a "terrible feeling of despair." Still, he presents himself as a fairly buoyant young man who became a pilot at age sixteen, went to work in aerodynamics, and was soon married with three children. The stresses of adult life were many, though, and as the problems piled up, Farron found that they had damaged the "gyroscopic instruments" of his mind, leaving him spinning and diving like an airplane doomed to crash. Crash he did, spending three years in the worst of his depression, nearly giving up to the "heavy emotional dampness" that overcame him. He extends his pilot's analogy to describe the emotional experience as "ice on his wings" (preventing lift).

Farron credits family and friends with helping him to recover, but clearly his unique way of processing his trauma was another big factor. One cannot get through his clever parody of anti-alcohol literature—"Is Thinking Destroying Your Life?"—without laughing. His treatment of the word "depression" as an acronym ("D is for Denial of d'whole thing") will likewise affirm that his spirit was never entirely crushed by his disease.

The only real problem with Farron's memoir is its brevity. Several dramatic events in his life remain mere sketches; readers will want to know more about his son's remarkable recovery from a brain-damaging accident, for instance. Because Farron's writing is vivid and compelling, *Ice on My Wings* is one of those rare instances when passengers will wish the flight were just a little bit longer.

SHEILA M. TRASK (February 21, 2013)

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