Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Just A Guy: An Autobiography by the Quiet Founder of ESPN

Don Rasmussen
CreateSpace
978-1-4827-4202-2
Two Stars (out of Five)

Sports network's "quiet founder" addresses his troubled family in a memoir aimed at setting the record straight.

Don Rasmussen recounts his role in founding the country's major sports network in *Just A Guy: An Autobiography by the Quiet Founder of ESPN*. But the book is much more than a retelling of how he and his family helped establish the successful network—it is a very personal story about a troubled childhood and complicated family relationships.

The first section, where Rasmussen provides a detailed account of his family history—starting with a childhood fraught with physical illness and psychological and emotional pain brought on by parents who made him feel like he didn't belong—is the most compelling. A happier but equally complicated relationship follows with Beth, Rasmussen's wife of more than fifty years. As he explains how he was determined to create a different environment than his own for his four children, readers will find Rasmussen's family experiences relatable, and both heartbreaking and heartwarming at times.

The sections that follow—which deal with his educational and work experiences—are somewhat disjointed because the narrative often backtracks and repeats information from a slightly different angle. The nonlinear narrative results in a confusing list of events without enough context, particularly when Rasmussen first briefly mentions his family's involvement in founding ESPN, which is likely to be the main draw for most readers.

In the meantime, Rasmussen relates how he moved often from job to job and state to state, from working on an assembly line to teaching and working in school administration, from joining the air force to serving as news director and disc jockey for a radio station. He conveys many interesting life experiences, but the time line of jobs is confusing.

It isn’t until the last third of the book that Rasmussen elaborates on how he helped found ESPN in 1978. Those chapters are revealing, but they are also the most bitter. Rasmussen’s purpose in writing the book appears to be to establish his role in the founding of the network, seemingly to counter reports in sports and business magazines that list only his brother and nephew as the founders.

While the Rasmussen family was directly involved in the network for only a few years, with Don Rasmussen the last to leave in 1981, it was a tumultuous time for the entire family. Rasmussen details dishonest dealings, disputes over stock shares, and how his brother pressured him to finally leave ESPN by convincing him his firing was imminent. The resentment that Rasmussen expresses toward his parents and brother is understandable given his account of events, but as he exposes the ill will between family members, it distances the reader and creates a sense of intrusion.

On the whole, *Just A Guy* will surely be enlightening, and possibly healing, for Rasmussen’s own family, particularly his wife and children.

Maria Siano