ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE NONFICTION

Lew Wallace, Boy Writer
Martha E. Schaaf
Cathy Morrison, illustrator
Patria Press Young Patriots Series
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The multi-talented Lew Wallace, a real-life descendant of John Paul Jones, often played hooky from school and got in trouble with his teachers for reasons young readers will appreciate.

Lew's fingers "itched" to draw, and later to write. When he drew a very realistic rabbit with the face of his teacher on the blackboard, the beating he received was bloody and Lew knew his artistic talents were not appreciated. After the beating, a farmer with whom Lew sought refuge told the boy that he should never give up doing what he liked best. The wise farmer also noted that "it takes a little time and patience to train a horse or a boy. Most of all, it takes love."

Times were hard on the Midwest frontier of the 1820s to 1830s. A brother succumbed to scarlet fever, and Lew's beloved mother died when he was seven. His father, governor of Indiana, was preoccupied with state affairs. Lonesome, Lew headed for his father's office one day and discovered the state library. His fingers itched to reach out and touch all the books. As he joyously searched the shelves, Lew met the state librarian and told him he planned to read every book in the library-a nice touch by the author, a career librarian and teacher.

Later, the professor at a private school recognized Lew's amazing reading habits and encouraged him to write. Unfortunately, the lure of a day of reading induced the boy to skip school and, as a consequence, to feel this new teacher's rod. Lew left school at age sixteen, and became a self-educated scholar. Schaaf mentions many impressive titles that young Wallace devoured as he grew.

Like his father, Lew became a lawyer and governor (of the territory of New Mexico). He was also a distinguished soldier in the Union Army, an inventor, an ambassador, and an artist. Putting itching fingers to good use, Lew wrote a number of books, including Ben Hur, published in 1880 when he was fifty-three. Performed on Broadway from 1899 to 1921, it became an award-winning film in 1959.

The third volume in a series, this book serves history as a tempting plate of adventure,

painful loss, and independence. It invites a thirst for learning beyond the classroom and growing beyond teachers who don’t encourage talent and potential.

Linda Salisbury