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Living in Peace While Living in Pieces

Michael Washington
iUniverse (Oct 14, 2016)
Softcover $14.99 (162pp)
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This memoir shows how peace can come even through difficult situations.

Living in Peace While Living in Pieces is a moving memoir by Michael J. Washington about how he moved from trauma to triumph in his life. The book is a mixture of autobiography and self-help, and is entertaining and inspiring throughout.

Washington tells his story of growing up near the public housing projects of St. Louis in a middle-class household, and of serving in the Navy. He became a happily married man and had a promising career. However, he destroyed his idyllic life by succumbing to alcohol and drug addiction. He relates how he overcame those addictions with the help of his wife and because of his faith in God, working to become a successful adjunct professor.

Washington writes effectively and clearly about how his life changed because of his poor choices. He describes how he lost control of his life, but regained it by becoming more spiritual and by being more attentive to his wife and family. His personal anecdotes about dealing with the death of his estranged son and being in the grips of substance abuse add depth to his self-help message about relying on faith, accepting responsibility, and reaching out to family to deal with trauma.

Washington includes sayings and phrases that have a self-help tinge, such as “peace intruders’’ to label people who block others’ paths to self-fulfillment. While Washington isn’t a substance abuse counselor and cautions that the opinions in the book are his own, there are still useful messages about honesty and personal responsibility.

Living in Peace While Living in Pieces includes the unique perspective of Washington’s wife, who details how his addictions affected her and their three children as he disappeared from the family and took large sums of money from their bank account to buy drugs. Her chapter is insightful.

The book is helpfully organized according to periods of Washington’s life. Themes of peace tie chapters together. Relatable prose plainly illustrates Washington’s many challenges, and simple sentences show that Washington is just an ordinary person who overcame the substance abuse that millions of other people suffer with. Some of the work is repetitive—Washington repeatedly mentions that he is from St. Louis, for example—and overly detailed, as with descriptions of the rooms in his family’s home.

In this strong work about conquering substance abuse and other life challenges, Washington shows how peace can come even through difficult situations.

ELLA VINCENT (January 17, 2017)

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