

Near Misses

Dominic Bulone Jr.

iUniverse (Aug 31, 2018)

Softcover \$13.99 (112pp)

978-1-5320-5594-2

Dominic Bulone's memoir Near Misses deals with the fragility of life in the face of death.

Dominic Bulone Jr.'s religious memoir *Near Misses* reads like a series of snapshots from a life defined by near-death experiences.

Bulone was born in Ohio in 1965. His book moves from his childhood near misses with death, involving things like playing with matches, toward challenges at the US Army boot camp's jungle school and close calls on slick winter roads. Each "near miss" is related with a keen eye for detail, noting specifics about the weather, the time of day, and the places involved.

Short chapters focus on specific incidents. Each is framed by a lead-in, explores the event itself, and ends with a lesson. Some of the events are cringeworthy, like a stick in the throat; others are more commonplace, like skidding off the highway in bad weather. None are spectacular, and most implications are left to the imagination. The text asserts that few people could have lived through all of the described events; this doesn't ring true.

The writing is fresh and clear. Scenes pop off the page with specifics about Southern life that are interesting and compelling. Bulone tells his stories in the present tense; they are further explained with the benefits of hindsight and adult understanding. One story sees a young Bulone careening down a steep hill in a toy car, crashing, and getting pinned beneath in a pile of poison ivy; it is narrated in a child's voice, and Bulone's adult narration concentrates on acknowledging his early foolishness. This method is well-grounded; the narrative perspective is always clear.

A religious and supernatural tone moves the book forward. Bulone connects stories from the Bible to his life, though these links are not fully explored. He describes paranormal experiences, too—seeing spirits battling before his eyes and seeing a UFO. These features are written with the same understated and matter-of-fact tone that characterizes the rest of book. Their meanings are not probed.

There is no clear overarching story to tie these episodes together, though. Each event is handled as separate and distinct. The rest of Bulone's life comes through via unexplored glimpses, including hints about his time in the army and working for the Department of Corrections. There's not enough context around any of the vignettes to hold the book together.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (December 11, 2018)

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