Clarion Review

Biography

Not That Well Rouded

Jerry Vest
CreateSpace
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Three Stars (out of Five)

“A lot of people describe their wild days as a time when they were experimenting with drugs,” the author observes in this memoir. “Not me, I was into full scale research.” Even that is an understatement.

In Not That Well Rounded, readers follow the roller-coaster life of Jerry Vest, a Midwestern boy whose unstable early family years laid the foundation for his eventual drug and alcohol-induced escapades over the next nearly forty years. Before the age of eleven he secretly witnessed a murder and was molested by his own drunken father.

It’s a sad story, but Vest’s ironic humor shines throughout, from the wry title he’s given his story to the little jabs he inserts as he observes his own life. For example, he recalls a girl he met at a strip club: “Her name was Misty. At least that was her stage name. In those strip clubs when they’re announcing these girls it almost sounds like a weather report. Misty, Stormy, Breezy, Summer, Rainy, etc.”

From Iowa to Florida (during the cocaine-fueled 1980s) to Washington state and back and forth again, with jobs as diverse as bartender, gym owner, A.W.O.L Marine, and drug dealer, Vest leaves marriages, children, and relationships in shambles in his continual pursuit of alcohol, drugs, and women.

He eventually comes to the conclusion he needs help, but even then he suffers a series of relapses to the point where, he writes, “I was beginning to believe that the world might be a better place if I was no longer a part of it.” Readers continually look for the happy ending they know should appear—but it doesn’t come until the very last page.

Flash-forward fifteen years. With the guidance of Alcoholics Anonymous and his belief in a higher power, Vest is now a different man. The first book he authored was Today I Pray. This—his second—is a cautionary tale of life on the dark side written by one who lived it and

survived. Readers who enjoy true stories about those who succeed over their tribulations may enjoy this memoir—or at least the author's self-deprecating style. During a time when he was trying to stay sober, he explained to a friend: "I couldn't be drinking anymore because I usually ended up having an allergic reaction. Sooner or later I'd break out in handcuffs or a treatment center."

A huge distraction is the number of grammatical errors in the text. They can almost be overlooked however, as readers become enthralled in Vest's story. Other details nearly make up for these errors, including the chapter numbers and titles that seem to tumble off the page—it's a small touch that makes a big difference.

Robin Farrell Edmunds