



## Pretty Boy: An Autobiography

**Wilbert Steven Ford**

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Look at your surroundings through the eyes of another for a short while, and your perspective on life may change significantly. William Steven Ford grew up in St. Louis under difficult circumstances. *Pretty Boy* is his story. Told with the candor one would expect of a compelling autobiography, this book of self-revelation is not only a learning experience, but an inspiration to everyone who has struggled and survived in a thorny environment.

Though memoirs often begin with a jagged youth, and this one is no exception, Ford brings to life countless scenes from his trouble-filled past. His imagery is vivid, allowing the reader to share his viewpoint as these distant events unfold once more in his book, as in the following excerpt: “Any boy who declined to do the chores assigned to him many times was beaten by the house parents, who did so with their hands or cut-off wooden mop sticks and broomsticks. When they conducted their adult child abuse, boys were forced to stand in corners and quietly sit on hard, wooden chairs facing the corners of walls, which was considered a mild punishment ...”

Though loosely edited, his conversational style sparks immediate interest and the desire to keep reading. Filled with descriptive scenarios detailing the graphic, dangerous encounters typical of big city interactions among strangers and peers, this book is not just a chronicle for posterity, it may help others avoid the pitfalls of urban living. Explicit about sexual situations and street violence, some sections may not be suitable for those who are easily offended, but the author's directness and honesty may be appreciated by readers who prefer an uncensored delivery.

With better content control, *Pretty Boy* would receive a higher rating. Its flaws are primarily production issues that could have been resolved with a good editor. A tendency to deviate from action-oriented narrative to assertion of opinion interrupts the flow of the text, slowing down the pace while exploring controversial and intellectual topics. In addition, the black-and-white photographs within the book have been left without captions and the nondescript front cover has no images. Yet despite its shortcomings, this memoir captures and maintains attention, a hurdle that many writers fail to overcome even with meticulous editing.

Wilbert Steven Ford is a teaching assistant. Born in 1945, he is now a strong proponent of higher education and attributes his own advancement to academics. This frank glimpse of the past is a valuable contribution to African American history and the humanities.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (May 12, 2011)

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