Clarion Review

Self-Help

Standing Alone: A Real-Life Journey... Staking Out A Meaningful Life, Through Mountains of Adversity

Jeff Bogue
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Jeff Bogue's unflinching, poignant debut autobiography depicts tragedies that could have ended his life or destroyed him emotionally. *Standing Alone: A Real-Life Journey…Staking Out A Meaningful Life, Through Mountains of Adversity* chronicles the author's journey through an abusive childhood, the horrors of the Vietnam War, the ups and downs of his love affairs, the births of his children, and the death of one daughter, to his present happy life in Australia. After each upheaval, Bogue bounces back with love for others, with resiliency, and with a dogged desire to move forward.

With evocative description and keen insight, Bogue transports readers to his past while using the wisdom of the present to analyze his experiences. These twin perspectives make the audience more invested in the events of the narrative. Bogue describes the settings of his stories and people's personalities with equal dexterity, making readers feel as if they live in these places and that the characters are their next door neighbors. The author catalogs the strengths and weaknesses of everyone, including himself, so that each character is round. For example, he recognizes that Cletis, his abusive and deluded mother who had a short fuse, was also a very mentally ill woman. He routinely takes himself to task for ignoring his own Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and for not being kinder to his ex-wives. Bogue's willingness to be self-critical *and* self-aware keeps him in the audience's good graces even as he makes mistakes.

Although Bogue shares his experiences in a conflict long over, his evolution from overly enthusiastic Vietnam War recruit to floundering veteran is instructive for anyone involved with soldiers today. His description of the myriad ways PTSD can manifest itself is particularly useful to those who work with trauma victims. Bogue also discusses how years of parental torture left him feeling unlovable and unable to give love. However, he tries many times to get

recognition from his demeaning parents. The author's thoughts toward his mother and father are typical of abuse victims, and will surely be noted by those who work to prevent the maltreatment of children.

For all its keenly felt content, Bogue's narrative often gets bogged down by turgid prose. For example, putting a dog on a leash is described like this: "The explorative nature of this canine finally necessitated a collar to preclude his wanderings." Describing his troubled brother, Bogue states, "Emotional decimation was his dowry." At times, meaning simply becomes lost in such flowery text. Bogue also distracts the reader by needlessly capitalizing common nouns and italicizing every word of dialogue. However, such minor points fade into the background of this engrossing tale of one man's triumph over tragedy.

Jill Allen