ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Stories for Boys: A Memoir
Gregory Martin
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Gregory Martin's beautiful first memoir, *Mountain City*, is no preparation for his intensely rendered second, *Stories for Boys*, and this is a good thing. Exploring new territory here, Martin intelligently avoids the serial memoirist's tendency to pick up where the first left off in story and emotional terrain; he also flexes more prose muscles to draw readers along a narrative that's both unexpected and universal.

The central questions Martin faces are: How does an adult, a married person and a parent himself, tackle the emotional and logistical fallout from the destruction of his parents' long marriage and revelations about one parent's secret life? How does he integrate the beloved father who has loved him all along and who is, simultaneously, an entirely unknown individual who has deeply hurt his spouse, carried on a deceitful life, and is also himself psychologically scarred, a victim of childhood sexual abuse?

Martin's father, in his sixties, botches a suicide attempt after he's discovered to be a closeted gay man who has engaged in hundreds of casual sexual encounters throughout the decades he's also been seemingly happily married to Martin's mother. The author, a compassionate liberal thinker who cares deeply about justice and equality, is still clumsily unprepared. What to say? When? How? Who to comfort—first, always? And his core inquiry: how to integrate everything he now knows with everything he once knew and go on having a relationship with his father, the man who is now his mother's ex-husband, the man who lied and endangered himself and others, but who is still the grandfather of the author's two small sons?

This memoir is as heartbreaking and challenging to read as *Mountain City* (about his maternal grandparents' life in a tiny Nevada town) was warm and reassuring. Martin writes in thoughtful, segmented chapters and includes emails from his father and occasional black-and-white photos; he also utilizes other literary devices that serve his story and engage the reader—a letter from the author's dog to his sons, reassuring them about Daddy's shaky emotional state; a chapter directed at the reader; an exploration of Walt Whitman's sexuality through his prose.

Throughout, the reader may wonder who these stories for boys are for. For the author's

sons, as counterpoints to the sandwiched way the author now must respond to a new normal? For Martin himself, as he works, and sometimes fails, to find his dad amid the sins of the father? For the abused and tormented little boy his father once was and who, despite his behavior, needs the succor of story as much as his son? For all of them, of course, who are fortunate they have Martin to tell them.

Lisa Romeo