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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

The Warrior in Me

D. E. Gray
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It is rare to find a street cop—a "warrior," in the author's description—who spent more than four decades on the front lines. Gray spent twenty-eight years with the Los Angeles police force, many as an elite "motor officer" (patrolling on motorcycles), and then another fourteen years with the Escondido department. Such a career invariably generates a catalog of sad, funny, and informative anecdotes. "Motor officers could always depend on a fireman to pull a prank on them whenever we would visit their firehouse to get out of the cold," D. E. Gray writes. "You could almost always expect to find your motor helmet in the freezer on a cold night when you were ready to leave."

Gray wasn't an administrator who set out to "work his way up the ladder through promotions." He writes, "I always considered myself as a 'warrior.' The 'warriors' got punched, kicked, slapped, and even spit on just because they wore a uniform."

The Warrior in Me covers Gray's early life in one chapter, but the next twenty-three follow him from the Los Angeles Police Academy, through a probationary period, and then onto the streets as a patrol officer. Gray even did a little "movie work," a lucrative sideline for some officers. "Andy Griffith, Katherine Ross, and Sam Elliott were all friendly and would talk to us," he writes. But there were tough assignments too: DUI patrol, riots, being thrust into security for the funeral of the soul singer Marvin Gaye, Jr.

Gray worked in Los Angeles during the Hillside Strangler scare and the notorious Rodney King incident and its riotous aftermath. His take on the King incident comes from the point of view of a veteran street cop who has been forced to use his baton. Generally, though, Gray is frank in his assessments of the foibles of his fellow officers; he has changed names to avoid embarrassing those who cannot defend themselves.

The author's Escondido memories, however, are filled with admiration for local officers and administration. To his delight, that city's force was small enough that an officer could follow an incident from reporting stage, through investigation, to formal charges. Gray ended his career as a field training officer and a police applicant background investigator.

This memoir is detailed but dispassionate and isn't quite successful as an introspective chronicle of a life in law enforcement. Considering that police officers must remain in control of their emotions, readers might empathize and sit back to enjoy the anecdotes. Less acceptable, considering the author's writing ability, are the occasional vocabulary missteps—for example, "finely" for "finally."

The Warrior in Me isn't a drama-laden page-turner. It is, nevertheless, an informative and educational book. Give a copy to anyone who talks about joining a big city police force; keep a copy for yourself and remember to be polite, cooperative, and empathetic next time you meet a police officer.

GARY PRESLEY (June 28, 2010)

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