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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

## There is a Road in North Dakota: Memories of a Dakota Budman

**Sam W. McQuade**
CreateSpace
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“Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.” -William Faulkner

Most memoirs today consist of the whining, tell-all confessions of spoiled celebrities. Readers are granted a full accounting of epic failures, shortcomings, and stupidities, followed by finger-pointing at everyone else, though mainly, mom and dad. Everything bad, all of the selfishness and self-destructive behavior, stems back to an “abusive childhood.” There lies the root of the “dysfunction.” That type of memoir / biography is insulting to readers.

*There is a Road in North Dakota* is a memoir of a baby-boomer, told with humor and integrity. Sam McQuade’s voice is that of a literate *man’s man*, such as Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, and a personal favorite of the author, William Faulkner. Growing up in a large and devout Catholic family, McQuade went to a Catholic grade school and high school. When it came time to pick a college, he considered a secular school. Instead, he writes, “I chose St. John’s University, lost in nowheresville near St. Cloud Minnesota, connected to a Benedictine Monastery. I have no idea where the idea came from. Probably from Mom. She asked me during my junior year, when we were beginning college applications, where I wanted to go. I told her Tulane University. I have absolutely no idea where that came from either…All I knew is that I loved the novels of William Faulkner, and from William Faulkner, I grew to love the South, without ever having been there.”

Born and raised in Bismarck, North Dakota shortly after World War II had ended, McQuade was instilled with the values and perseverance that helped him overcome life’s tragedies with humility, humor, and humanity. His prose is balanced with just the right amount of “aw shucks” wisdom, and the observations of an intelligent, well-read individual who knows how to mine and refine a wealth of experiences. More importantly, the author is able to articulate the influence of his mother and father. McQuade recognizes that his parents were tough and flawed, but also loving and had the best intentions for their children. A marine, his father survived the destruction of a battleship during World War II. His mother was one of the many women factory workers vital to the war movement.

After 9/11, the United States changed overnight. Suddenly, we were a nation afraid of terrorist acts, and also afraid of ourselves. We seemed especially fearful of the brazen, defiant, impervious attitude we had cultivated after WWII. Our vices, such as smoking and drinking (once considered rites of passage), were demonized. Instead of manning up and accepting the consequences of our actions, we now blame manufacturers, and institute laws that basically protect us from ourselves. Feeling safe and secure became more important than personal freedom, and political correctness became dogma, ending an incredible era. McQuade’s memoir describes this lost era with elegance and humor. Certain readers will, no doubt, develop nostalgic yearnings for a time of confidence, enthusiasm, risk-taking, and personal responsibility.

LEE GOODEN (December 3, 2010)

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