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Wisdom While Walking

Terran D. Jackson
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We read memoirs to confirm that we are not alone, that others have faced trials like our own. New author Terran D. Jackson knows this, and she dedicates her memoir, *Wisdom While Walking*, to "all the people who feel like they are in a hopeless situation and think that their present is going to dictate their future." This determined problem solver testifies that it just isn't so. In a life filled with trauma and seemingly insurmountable challenges, she has never lost hope. She shares her inspiring story in the hopes of leading others to a life filled with faith and blessings among the hardships.

The hardships for young Jackson are many, though her innate ability to rise above them is evident from her earliest passages. "Although we lived in the housing projects," she writes, "I didn't know we were poor." Instead of focusing on what she lacked, Jackson focused on goals she could accomplish, like maintaining a perfect attendance record at school. From the beginning, this girl had goals and nothing would stop her—not an absent father, a diagnosis of sickle-cell anemia, or poverty. Writing in a naturally conversational voice, Jackson's buoyancy infuses every word she writes, making this an easy book to read despite its sometimes-difficult subject matter.

Jackson attributes much of her success to her faith in God. The religious message of Jackson's book is apparent from the "Footprints"-poem-inspired cover and her frequent prayers. "Dear God, please," is a repeated refrain. Still, this is not a denominational book; there's no call to a particular religious practice. Jackson's faith sustains her life, so it flows naturally along with all the other details of her story.

Jackson has a talent for recreating conversations with realistic dialogue that captures characters and their relationships with apparent ease. Some of the most evocative scenes come from her childhood memories of time spent with her affectionate but firm grandmother ("Terran, come in here, girl," she commands), and hospital conversations between an adult Jackson and her critically ill husband are also realistic.

Jackson travels the world in the pages of her memoir, from Alabama to Korea to South Africa, revealing as much about her own experience as she does about any particular location. Alabama is where she is startled by her first experience of racism from the white community, for instance, while South Africa brings a different type of discrimination: here too she's judged by her skin color, until she reveals her American accent and automatically gets respect.

Jackson's writing generally flows easily across the page, making this a memoir that can be read in one or two sittings. Occasionally, problems with word choice or homophones create a snag—a church "bizarre," for instance—but the presentation is otherwise smooth.

What comes across consistently is Jackson's optimism, reliance on faith, determination to always move forward, and belief that such movement is possible for everyone. *Wisdom While Walking* is a memoir that says "I did it and you can, too."

SHEILA M. TRASK (February 12, 2014)

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