



Reader's Choice Literary Reviews

Battling the Blessings - Terry Fulgham

Battling the Blessings is author Terry Fulgham's life story which spans over fifty years, reflecting on his childhood, the teen years, and into his adulthood. Fulgham changed the names of the characters, including his own, to protect the innocent.

We meet Reggie Manchester-Pallor as a nine-year-old in 1956. Reggie lived in Flint, Michigan with his grandparents, who he lovingly referred to as "Big Mama" and "Papa Manchester." The Manchester house was a caring, respectful, and disciplined Christian home. Growing up then was different than it is today; children only spoke to adults when they were spoken to. If a kid stepped out of line, they were spanked. Reggie saw his share of spankings, or whippings, as he called them. Reggie was very close to his grandparents and, as his father was not around; Papa Manchester was his only male influence.

The passing of Papa Manchester left a profound emptiness in 10-year-old Reggie's life, leaving him with a feeling of helplessness. A few months after the loss of his grandfather, Reggie met Jesse "Pancake" Stoner. Reggie was small for his age and a favorite target of bullies. Pancake was one of the biggest kids in school. With Pancake around, no one bothered Reggie. Pancake and Reggie grew to be as close as brothers, and together were both respected and feared in their neighborhood. At age 13, Reggie, Pancake and their friends began drinking wine, smoking, and later, stealing cars.

Reggie was the only one of his friends to graduate from high school. In the last few years of school, he held numerous jobs where he was known as a hard and dedicated worker. This weekday life differed greatly from his weekends, as he continued to love the street life. Drinking alcohol and cough syrup (for a codeine high), popping pills, fighting, stealing, and chasing girls filled his off work hours. Big Mama doubted Reggie would see his 21st birthday if he didn't stop his street life.

The failure of his second marriage and the death of a close friend had Reggie drinking more than ever and deeper into drugs and his life of crime. It took losing a fight to a younger man, being severely beaten, and his mother's desperate pleading for him to straighten out his life to get Reggie to take his sobriety seriously and pray, "Lord, stop me from drinking."

Much more than a story of addiction, *Battling the Blessings* is a snapshot of American history. Fulgham treats us with his memories of growing up in the 50's and 60's, using the slang and lingo of that time in his realistic dialogue. He adds the music, clothes, hairstyles, and vehicles of the day and tells his riveting story with his own unique style to take us back to that turbulent time.

Battling the Blessings isn't simply a kid-gets-hooked-on-booze-and-drugs-and-turns-his-life-around story. It is an unflinching and inspiring telling of a man's struggle with himself and his demons. Fulgham doesn't make excuses for his actions; he takes full responsibility. Reggie isn't a bad guy—he is a smart, compassionate person who just made many bad choices. I found myself cheering for him, hoping that he would one day leave the street life behind and make himself and his family proud.

This is Fulgham's first book. However, he writes with the skill of a seasoned author. He knows how to spin a story in a way that will affect and captivate his reader. Often, I was laughing at his humor, shaking my head in shock, and misting up at a sad passage all in the same chapter. I highly recommend this entertaining glimpse into a remarkable life. 5 Stars.

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Reviewed by William Potter for Reader's Choice Literary Reviews