

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

HYPOCRITES IN HIS MIDST

A Story About Flawed Human Beings

Wilson, Donnell

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BOOK REVIEW

Wilson's memoir chronicles the life and times of an ordinary man.

"Yes, I made mistakes," says Wilton Latso at the beginning of Wilson's readable, unassuming nonfiction debut. "Who hasn't?" In the course of the nearly 500 pages that follow, Wilton remembers and retells the story of his life, from his birth in a small town in Missouri to his youth in the rough housing projects of St. Louis, where his parents moved to find work. Wilton recalls a fairly normal, non-Norman Rockwell childhood growing up with his younger sister and brother, and he doesn't shy away from narrating the grimmer aspects of those years, from grade-school bullies to the growing enmity between his parents ("They were Christians. They were supposed to forgive each other," he observes. "What could they have possibly done wrong to each other?"). Wilton is an outgoing boy who turns into an outgoing young man, someone who makes friends—and eventually falls in love—easily. By the time he's 20, he has a wife, three kids and a job he dislikes, but the author's steady narrative hand prevents the amassing details from becoming too tedious. We follow Wilton and his friends and family through the middle years of the 20th century, watch as they drink and smoke dope and fight each other and reconcile. Through it all, we see Wilton himself grow wiser and more candid about the way he's chosen to live his life: "A life without boredom often means a lot of mistakes." He moves from job to job, always trying to balance having a good time with being a decent, responsible guy, and Wilson does a sure-handed, efficient job of layering the events of the larger world into his characters' lives. We see them frightened by Vietnam and disillusioned by the Nixon administration, and we see them sometimes subsumed by the recreational drug culture of the '70s. As the cast grows older (and expands with grandchildren), there's an enjoyable sense of having watched these people grow and—sometimes reluctantly—mature.

A substantial life-and-times novel.