



The Prince of Frogtown

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The final volume of Rick Bragg's bestselling and beloved American saga documents a mesmerizing journey back in time to the lush Alabama landscape of Rick's youth, to Jacksonville's one-hundred-year-old mill and to Rick's father, the troubled, charismatic hustler coming of age in its shadow.

Inspired by Rick Bragg's love for his stepson, *The Prince of Frogtown* also chronicles his own journey into fatherhood, as he learns to avoid the pitfalls of his forebearers. With candor, insight, and tremendous humor, Bragg seamlessly weaves these luminous narrative threads together and delivers an unforgettable rumination about fathers and sons.

The Prince of Frogtown Details

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Pat says

"He had been doing time in the county lockup when he got out the last time, sick and thin. But she was at peace, and it seemed so was he. There was no catalyst we knew of, no evangelism. It was more like he just got tired and decided he wanted to live quiet the rest of his days. She prayed he was truly over that life of self-destruction that took my father, but it didn't matter if it was permanent. Every day was a gift. Then an old charge, a dusty charge, resurfaced in the courts, and sent him off again. My mother was more stunned than brokenhearted, "'cause he done so good," and it seemed like she just shrank in her clothes. He disappeared into the state system, to Atmore, and I thought it would kill her. Everyone says that about mothers and sons, but sons do kill their mothers that way."

In this book that finishes the telling of his childhood growing up in a mill town in Alabama; Rick Bragg comes full circle. In this book he puts to rest (we hope) the ghost of his father. Charlie Bragg; married a beautiful woman, had three sons and abandoned them to drink. In going back and trying to understand his father; Bragg is also trying become a husband and father. This book will make you laugh and make you cry. I could smell the chicken frying, hear the women shouting in the church and see the stars in the foothills of Alabama. Rick Bragg can make all your senses come to life in his books; and break your heart.

"Old women call it loafing, and I've always loved that word. I guess it is just how we say the word "loafing," but the way we say it makes you think of loafers, of wearing out your shoe leather for no good purpose. Old women like to sniff and use it as a condemnation. "He ain't here. He's off loafing." It means you are shirking work and responsibility. To the men who loaf, it means they are free, free to waste time, to count mailboxes, and wave at other old men who, as the rear bumper vanishes in the distance, wish they were loafing, too. I plan to loaf someday. At least I hope to."

Jim Richardson says

I suppose Rick Bragg can be a little melodramatic but I really like listening to his narration and I can't help finding it interesting to hear about his family's struggles through poverty , alcoholism and violence. I enjoyed this final chapter of his story.

Terri says

Bragg's third and last book in the trilogy about his family.

Nobody tells the story of the poverty and hard times of living in the foothills of the Appalachian's like Bragg does. He captures the resiliency, strength and love of his people, because he lived it. The good times and the bad.

This final story is about his father. When Rick becomes the step-father of a ten-year boy, he seems to dig deep within to reflect on the father/son relationship.....something he never really had the opportunity to experience himself as a son.

A wonderful read! Humorous, poignant and thought-provoking...I highly recommend this wonderful memoir!

Debra says

Rick Bragg is an amazing writer with a gift for choosing the exact word or metaphor to make his point. In *The Prince of Frogtown* he examines fatherhood, looking both at his father and his stepson. His hard living, hard fighting, hard drinking father was a miserable SOB by most lights...but he kept good friends, and the love of his women, at least for a while.

Rick's family gives him excellent fodder for self examination. I'm glad I read these books and recommend them widely.

(This is the third of his reminiscences. They start with *All Over But the Shouting*, and continue with *Ava's Man*.

Warren says

Rick Bragg snatches you out of your own life and immerses you in his history in such a way that you feel you are his vicarious wing-man, only to realize that you are only witnessing the parallels of his and your own experiences. His trilogy of *All Over But The Shoutin'*, *Ava's Man*, and *The Prince of Frogtown* is a must-read for anyone, especially the Southern Man, searching for their own identity.

There is an interesting comparison between Rick Bragg and Lewis Grizzard in that their individual characters were informed by their relationship with their absent fathers, who left their ability to nurture their sons and love their wives on the Korean battlefield. That Bragg and Grizzard were each able to leap this chasm of loss and neglect to live their lives successfully is an example of the resiliency of the human spirit.

Dianne says

This was a great book, a follow-up to his previous books about his family - *It's All Over But the Shouting*, and *Ava's Man*. I enjoyed it very much, a look into what life was like for those living in the mill villages of the South. My father grew up in a mill village in Macon, Georgia - he read this book and said this was so true to what was endured by the families during those times. And Mr. Bragg doesn't just tell a story, he paints a moving picture full of detail and emotion.

Susan says

I picked up this book from the library because it's a memoir and is about a step-father/step-son relationship, two things of interest to me and dear to my heart. I know very little about the American South, so wasn't sure I would really care much about it. I know more about China than I do parts of my own country, sadly enough. But Rick Bragg is such a good story teller and brings Alabama and Texas to life through his vibrant writing that I found myself not able to put the book down--and it wasn't just because of the memoir and step-father/son relationship. Recommended to anyone who is interested in small-town America of the past.

Linda says

I love Rick Bragg's writing! In this third and last trilogy of his family memoirs he shares the struggles of his alcoholic father in an intricate merging of his own growing relationship with his stepson. "All Over But the Shouting" remains my favorite, but this is a good read with a powerful ending.

Reading that Rick is now a Professor of Writing at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa makes me want to go back to school!

Melissa says

Memorable quotes:

"We were driving through Piedmont...my grandfather Bobby was holding a bottle half hidden by a popcorn bag...I lived a long time after that believing you could hide any sin in the Bible if you had a big enough brown paper bag. I wish they made them people-sized. I would carry one in my trunk, or sleep in one, just to be sure."

"This is what it is like, I thought, to be the circus bear. You pace your cage until they let you out to do tricks. You talk about tuition, hardwood floors, braces and sometimes algebra, and see how long you can balance on that wobbling ball before you go beserk and eat the crowd. Sometimes you bust out, but never get further than the Exxon station before you go slouching home, for treats. You are a tame bear now. They will have you riding a red tricycle and wearing a silly hat before too long."

Hannah says

I have forgotten just how powerful, how raw, how magical and how simply beautiful Rick Bragg's writing is. I never experienced the kind of life Rick had, never knew privations like his people did, never saw the rough side of life or experienced the spirit quenching miseries that they did.

...so why do I relate so much to it?

The best I can come up with is that reading Rick Bragg is like pulling back an unhealed scab and watching it bleed all over again. In the same way, it can sometimes hurt to read Bragg, but once you start, you can't stop until you peel away the final pages. His writing exposes what's deepest inside us; what hurts we nurse in secret, what dreams we cherish that might not come to fruition, what pain we can't let go of. This sounds trite and melodramatic as I type it, but it's only because I don't have the words or the ability to express how Bragg's writing affects me. I spent 20 solid minutes sobbing after I finished this book, and the next 20 minutes thinking about why I sobbed, and a final 20 minutes trying to come to terms with it and get some sleep. Frankly, I have no answers, except to say that Bragg speaks my language. His story about coming to terms with his father is one I understand - but in a different way. He lost his father to alcohol. I lost mine to death. His father was an absent SOB. Mine was just absent.

The bottom line: we've all got issues in life. Bragg writes about them with the soul of a poet. He's a true

Southern storyteller, and man, what a story he has to tell.

Cheri says

"Paradise was never heaven-high when I was a boy but waist-deep, an oasis of cutoff blue jeans and raggedy Converse sneakers, sweating bottles of Nehi Grape and Orange Crush, and this stream."

"I saw my first water moccasin here, and my first real girl, and being a child of the foot washers I have sometimes wondered if this was my Eden, and my serpent. If it was, I didn't hold out any longer than that first poor fool did. It took something as powerful as that, as girls, to tug me away from this tribe of sunburned little boys, to scatter us from this place of double-dog dares, Blow Pops, Cherry Bombs, Indian burns, chicken fights, and giggling, half-wit choruses of 'Bald-Headed Man from China.'"

"I don't know what kind of man I turned out to be, but I was good at being a boy. Then, a thrust to the heart only bent against my chest, in a place where I could look straight into the Alabama sun through a shipwrecked emerald instead of just a piece from a broken bottle of Mountain Dew!"

Rick Bragg began this story of his family, their roots, in his 1997 *All Over But the Shoutin*, and then returned in 2001 with his second *Ava's Man*. This is the third book in this story of his life, his father, who was *The Prince of Frogtown*.

Set in the mill workers section known as Frogtown, in Jacksonville, Alabama, this story begins in the 1950s, but there are really two stories - Bragg's story of his own childhood, of his father and the struggles he and his brothers endured, along with their mother, with some exploration of the man his father was, his youth and their hardscrabble life. Intertwined with this is Bragg's learning how to become a stepfather, how to relate to a young boy who is nothing like he had been at the age of ten, how their relationship changes over time.

If you've read either of the first two books, it shouldn't come as too much of a surprise that there is a lot of whiskey, more than a little bit of fighting, a jail where everybody knows your name, and almost everyone works at the same mill in this small town, and everybody's daddy knows your daddy, and everything he's done.

"It was a good world for drunks, then, and a bad world for everybody else. A man could rise up in his drunkard's raiment at night, dripping poison, and pull it off in the day like dirty clothes. I often wondered if a man could look in the daylight on the drunk he was, would there be any drunks at all?"

Within each chapter are Bragg's father's story and a separate story about Bragg's challenges with his role as a stepfather, and learning to accept his stepson's differences over time. I didn't have any problem with this transition since each transition is clearly marked with the heading of 'The Boy.'

I loved Bragg's *All Over But the Shoutin*, and *Ava's Man*. While this was a bit different from those two, a reconciliation that, perhaps, his father had some qualities worthy of love and admiration, even if he hadn't shared them with his son as much as he should have. And with that also seems to come a greater acceptance of seeing his stepson in a different light, perhaps as his father saw him. Different than him. The difference between the two men being that the son seems able to see that difference, and accept it, and see his stepson as worthy of his love, all the same.

Alex Bledsoe says

Bragg's third book about his origins in Alabama, this one deals with his alcoholic, unreliable father. There's a huge level of ego masquerading as self-deprecation here, as in, "look how poor I was" and "look how hard it is for me to relate to my own son," which all carry the implied "look how marvelous I am now for having gone through this," when really all he's done is be a better man than his father, not a hard job given the portrayal here. Still, Bragg can write and create a vivid mise-en-scene, even if the subject of the book, his father, remains a prime example of mean white trash.

Michelle says

"All Over but the Shoutin'" and "Ava's Man" left me with a sense of something positive--well-being or even a slight modicum of peace, "The Prince of Frogtown" did the exact opposite--it saddened me and angered me. Bragg discusses his father with a distance that makes him seem surreal so it's hard to feel emotion towards him. I did feel that sadness and anger towards Bragg himself when it came to his chapters about his step-son and his treatment of him. Though Bragg seems honest about himself, he also always has this underlying "that was how I was brought up" attitude about his treatment of "the boy". I find that to be an abhorrent reasoning when it comes to raising a child...he says at one point that the boy felt like an afterthought--and that's exactly how Bragg's writing about him comes across.

Bragg's blustering swagger and red-neck ways have been discussed ad nauseum by readers, critics, and writers, but this is the first time I've been seriously put off by it. It came across as somewhat backwards and charming in the other books, it comes off as misguided and mean-spirited in this one.

In addition to that, I just didn't find this book to be as cohesive and well-thought out as the other two. It seemed like he was really stretching for material to fill the pages and that stretch caused a lack of depth in the story.

Chrissie says

Again, here is a book that you must stick with; it improves. By the end I really liked it - a lot! Yup, this one is as good as the author's Ava's Man, about his maternal grandfather and grandmother.

The book is set in Jacksonville, Alabama, in primarily the 1950s and 1960s. Don't make the hasty assumption that this book concerns racial questions. No, it is about poor whites. You know the term Hillbillies and what that brings to mind. The author is writing about his relationship with his father and his 10 year-old stepson. To know how he should be to be a father he first had to understand his relationship with his own father, and this was very troubled. This new son who came to his doorstep, along with the woman he wanted to marry, was as far from any boy he ever had known. How do you relate to what is completely foreign? If anything he was just that kind of boy that had been a childhood enemy. To become a father, a good father, he first had to understand himself, his own boyhood and his father. Did he succeed?

Think poor white trash. This is very bluntly put, but you will get my meaning. Think whiskey and fighting,

rudimentary education and no jobs, in the South, out in the boondocks, a small cotton mill town. THAT employment was one of being torn to shreds in dangerous machines, the pay so small you can wonder if it is pay. So how do you survive? Religion? Booze? Women? And how difficult is it to change and leave and escape a bad family milieu. Can you change everything? Not everything. To be clear, this is not a book about how one can leave and escape. It is a book about understanding that life he came from, and we readers learn with him. Do we really know what such a life is really like? Here is a window to look into.

I was thinking this - what makes some people change, escape, while others remain? (I have read that alcoholism is perhaps inherited; it comes with our genes.) You know whiskey was on the table like a salt shaker sits there on a table. But why is it that one person can break the bad cycle of generations of drinkers and fighters and womanizers, and another cannot? What makes one person succumb and another revolt and leave? We also see Rick's two other brothers and how they react, but primarily we see his father and it is shocking. He drank, he always drank and he was mean when he drank and at the end that is all he did. You cannot but ask yourself why; why is it like this and how can this change and well, there is a lot to think about?! Rick Bragg looks honestly at his life, at his father's and his mother's and their mothers and fathers. He does this with honesty, explaining how each thing happened as it did. This is not an easy read, but it is worth reading - to understand the nifty-gritty facts of another's life. For me it was a life I knew little of.

What made it very hard in the beginning was that I didn't know who was who. By the end I understood. Pronouns are used and you can't quite be sure who that person is. You hear: "the woman", "the boy" and "he" and I"! Who, who is I? This drove me crazy. There are alternating chapters, first one about his father's life and then a chapter about time spent with his stepson. It wasn't the change in time perspective but the unclear use of pronouns that threw me. You also hear the views of others, who knew the relatives, and there are lots of relatives, and this was confusing at times. You hear about other people too, because no man is an island. Police Chief Ross, for example. To understand Rick's father you also have to understand Ross and others too, friends and foes. Who we become is just such a blend of those around us along with our own strengths and weaknesses!

Yes, this is a very good book. I admire the author for so honestly revealing who he is and why he is who he is. The author reads his own writing in the audiobook; it feels that he is speaking from the heart. The dialect is Southern and I had difficult at times deciphering the words, but it shouldn't be read any other way.

Think if for once I could write a short review!

Kbwilliams says

Not as strong as "All Over but the Shoutin'" but still, no one evokes time and place among contemporary authors like Rick Bragg. He alternates stories about his much-reviled father -- a drunk who left his wife and three sons in the lurch -- with stories about him and his new stepson (his boy).

His portrait of his dad is more nuanced here, but the outcome of course does not change and you hurt all over again for his beloved mother. The stories about Bragg and his boy are delightful and fun to read.
