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The Orphans' Nine Commandments: A Memoir (review)

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to New York and enrolled in the Clarence H. White School of Photography, whose former students included such noted photographers as Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange. There, through the project method of instruction, she mastered the fundamental principles of technique, and in 1935 she returned to Texas in time to join in promotional efforts well underway for the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas. In her months-long assignment to document the state photographically, Smith traveled to all its regions, providing dramatic images of everyday Texas that national publications and focused marketing strategies soon spread widely. In the process, she effectively compiled the most extensive visual record of the state to that time.

In her treatment of Smith, author Baker appropriately chose (with a few minor exceptions) to separate the photographer's life history from the abundance of large-format photos included in the book, allowing the images to speak for themselves, which they do effectively. Readers will appreciate the broad range of Smith's work that includes layered complexities ("Crowd scene at Arlington Downs. Arlington, Texas," p. 83); dramatic simplicity ("Peppers. East Texas," p. 181); stark contrasts ("Workmen sitting on the struts of an oil derrick. East Texas," p. 103); artistic patterning ("Orange grove. Rio Grande Valley," p. 149); architectural detailing (Ysleta Mission. El Paso, Texas," p. 163); and, enduring human elements ("Loading timber. Piney Woods, Texas," page 189). The collection is evocative of and complementary to works of other celebrated photographers of the New Deal era.

A Texas Journey is a compelling study of a significant artist, whose career and influence spread well beyond her centennial assignment. It gives readers an opportunity to appreciate how the cultural landscape of Texas influenced her work and how she in turn used her remarkable talents and unique perspectives to share her gratitude with the world.

Pflugerville

DAN K. UTLEY

The Orphans' Nine Commandments: A Memoir. By William Roger Holman. Foreward by Ted Blevins. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2007)

In May 1932, Anna Bechan packed her little boy's clothing in a cardboard box, took him by the hand and boarded an Oklahoma City trolley. Around twilight, she led him through the doors of the Oklahoma Society for the Friendless and left him there. He never saw her again.

With this, six-year-old Roger Bechan stepped into a new world: one where adults could not be trusted and other children were not always allies; where he was a commodity to be sold by his caretaker; where minor acts of rebellion were met with corporal punishment or abandonment; and where nobody would tell him about his own past or explain how he came to be in his situation.

Even his name was not his own. Over his five years in institutional and foster care placements, Roger Bechan was alternately known as Bill Minter, Billy Hardt, Will Rogers, Roger Beacham, and finally, William Roger Holman, the name he goes by today. Now in his early eighties, Holman has chronicled his childhood in

a new autobiography, *The Orphans' Nine Commandments*. (The title derives from a decision made by him and his friends that they could live by all the Commandments except the fifth: to honor their mothers and fathers.)

Holman would learn that he was not the child of divorce, as he had always believed, but illegitimate. Why his mother had chosen to abandon him was never clear. Like many parents during the Great Depression, she simply may not have been able to afford his care. In 1933, the number of children living in American orphanages reached a record high of 150,000. Like many of them, he became a form of property to be sold to desperate couples looking for children; his state-appointed guardian collected hundreds of dollars in fees from foster placements over the years. Writing from the perspective of a young boy, Holman does not dwell on the socioeconomics of the times. The reasons for his plight mattered little to the child.

Holman is careful to balance the bitter with the sweet. Interspersed with moments of neglect and outright abuse are memories of boyhood escapades and moments of love and kindness from some of his foster families. He learned to survive in institutional life, often through lying and stealing; at the same time, he came to understand that he needed to learn to control his destructive tendencies if he was to find a permanent home.

Taught to read by his mother before his abandonment, he developed a lifelong love of books that helped him through his darker periods and led him to a successful career in library science and printing. Spending much of his professional life in Texas, Holman headed the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, the San Antonio Public Library, and the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas. As a printer, he produced what is often called the most beautiful book ever published in Texas, Al Lowman and Barabara Whitehead's *This Bitterly Beautiful Land: A Texas Commonplace Book*.

Life does not provide unequivocally happy endings, and Holman's is no exception. Despite a solid career and family life—including a marriage that has stretched more than sixty years—he struggled for decades with paralyzing depressions and a yearning to understand the mysteries of his childhood. He approaches his story with a palpable sense of awe that he survived his early life with his soul intact.

Palmyra, Virginia

HEATHER K. MICHON

Mary Martin, Broadway Legend. By Ronald L. Davis. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. Pp. 328. Illustrations, notes on sources, appendix, index. ISBN 9780806139050, \$26.95 cloth.)

Mary Martin, Broadway Legend is a charming tribute to a performer whose "place in the history of American musical theater," according to its author, "is singular" (xi). Ronald L. Davis, Professor Emeritus of History at Southern Methodist University, has written on other entertainment legends, John Ford and John Wayne among them, but his special fondness for Mary Martin and the roles and characters she made famous is clearly conveyed in this volume's pages.