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Mark Sanders

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THE DAYS OF GOSPEL + RADIO

—By Dr. Mark Sanders

Vicarity

A review of Kay Hively and Albert E. Brumley, Jr.'s I'LL FLY AWAY: THE LIFE STORY OF ALBERT E. BRUMLEY (Branson, MO: Mountaineer; \$10.00).

Albert Brumley, born and reared near Spiro, Oklahoma, is less famous than the songs he composed. Those of us who attend church and sing hymns may be acquainted with "I'll Fly Away," "He Set Me Free," and "Turn Your Radio On"; yet Brumley may be a stranger to us. The music may be memorable because it is simple and accessible. However, less memorable, if this biography is any evidence, is the simple, accessible man responsible.

Much of the biography's intent is the son's wish to keep his father's memory alive and to, perhaps, elevate the father above the music. The task, however, fails because Albert Brumley, Sr. is nearly invisible. A modest man, he did not seek publicity nor need the public's adoration; he turned down opportunities to move to Nashville to become a star. He attended church regularly; he was a good father, a good husband, and a sober man whose only real vice was cigarette smoking. Albert Brumley was a good man and,

consequently, an invisible one. Nothing his son nor Kay Hively can do in I'LL FLY AWAY makes him any more visible or memorable.

Certainly, sections of the book are interesting because of nostalgia. Anecdotes about floods that occurred sixty years ago, lost toy wagons, typhoid, music schools, and muddy roads for Model T cars are curiosities for those of us who did not live during the Depression. Brumley's bartering for new automobile tires during World War II is interesting, considering that most of us have not wanted for anything.

However, such nostalgia is part of the biography's failure. While the tales involve Brumley and hint at his unpretentious character, they really have less to do

with him than with the way people lived. That important, indispensable information that would bring Brumley back to life in print seems omitted.

Actually, the book's best sections have nothing to do with Brumley directly; they are anecdotes about Brumley's friends Everett and Elmer, characters far more interesting than Brumley himself. Furthermore, for those interested in the music, the greatest disappointment may be the book's appendix. The authors list the recording artists who have done Brumley's songs but fail to identify which songs these artists actually recorded. A more complete discography seems necessary.

Overall, Albert Brumley, Jr. has not convincingly recreated his father's life; the songs outlive the songwriter, and, consequently, the songwriter's story is inessential. As a ghostwriter, Hively has not successfully filled in the gaps that would make this book seem more biographical and less anecdotal.

(DR MARK SANDERS, whose Ph.D. in English is from the University of Nebraska, now holds the Assistant Professor rank in his first year in the SOSU Language Arts Department.) *

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