

## Caveman Chronicles

**Todd Mayo**

Bird & Baby Press

(328pp)

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*Caveman Chronicles is a busy and magnetic memoir that draws parallels between the lessons of youth and professional successes.*

Nashville music insider Todd Mayo's adventure-filled memoir *Caveman Chronicles* covers his childhood, business endeavors, and industry dealings.

Mayo grew up in Tennessee and owns a cave where the *Bluegrass Underground* radio and television shows (now *The Caverns Sessions*) are staged. Interspersing childhood memories with career insights, his busy and magnetic text draws parallels between the lessons of his youth and his professional successes, declaring "This is my story of when myth became reality and when reality got mythic." He made use of consciousness-altering drugs as a seventeen-year-old and later sold health products of questionable usefulness. And as he moved toward his eventual goals, there were recalibrations: at one point, he walked away from his business partner to reroute the course of his life; he also evaded being in a serious relationship prior to his thirties.

The book moves with such speed between stories and time periods that names and events become muddled; its transitions are jarring and its segues are insufficient. Still, this is a personable text whose language is casual, even vulgar at times. Some of its more colorful stories, as when Mayo describes seeing his uncle naked or complains about an "ego-riddled corporate dickhead," make it quite relatable. Some clichés are included in the mix, though, as with the early reflection "My head was always in the sky, but my feet always felt like they were on unsteady ground."

The book's coverage of Mayo's support systems is clear—in particular when it comes to the men in his life, including his family members, fellow writers, and some musicians, whose influences on him are celebrated throughout, even when such influences seem to be outwardly negative. For example, Mayo recalls that his father committed a crime and went to prison, thus rupturing their family's life, but the text also extends empathy to him and balances this depiction with later memories of Mayo living with him again. In comparison, the women in Mayo's life are ill-humanized and receive limited page space. This uneven coverage extends to Mayo's mother and his wife, who facilitated much of his upbringing and career but who are often fleshed out in a negative light; his mother, for example, is called "bitter," and the balance that's present in the characterization of Mayo's father is absent when it comes to her.

*Caveman Chronicles* is an engrossing memoir about growing up in Memphis and forging a career in the music industry.

SARAH FRIDESWIDE (June 12, 2024)

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