

Jazzy Zigzaggin' Blues: A Poetic Novel

Dalvin Clifford

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Jazzy Zigzaggin' Blues is a wonderful story about two girls trying to figure out where they fit in the world.

Drawing from elements in his own life, Dalvin Clifford tells the story of two African American friends who grew up together in *Jazzy Zigzaggin' Blues*. Vivid writing and meaningful poetry facilitate the clever crafting of this universal story of two people's unfolding lives.

Mary and Rainbow, friends since childhood, share almost everything with each other. They see each other through family troubles, love interests, and neighborhood drama. But one secret stands between them. As close as they are throughout their lives, they are also worlds apart. This story is their story: one of life, love, and forgiveness.

Jazzy Zigzaggin' Blues provides as much a glimpse into what it may be like to grow up in a poor African American neighborhood as it tells a story anyone can appreciate. Characters are living in close quarters, struggling to pay bills, and trying, often unsuccessfully, to keep their children safe. But these same characters are still trying to make good choices, for themselves and for their children.

Colorful word choice generates wonderful mental imagery throughout the narrative. Mary reflects on the nature of her early friendship with Rainbow when "the walls held more of their secrets than any diary ever could." And, as she gets to know a potential love interest in high school, Mary's "curiosity about Carlos was well fed that following day at lunch."

The title, *Jazzy Zigzaggin' Blues*, the origin of which is explained in the narrative, aptly characterizes the twists and turns of life that we all inevitably face: the ups and downs, and the back and forth that typically happens between them.

Two points of confusion do cause some minor interference with overall immersion in the story. In the chapter where Wade injures himself after losing his balance and falling backward, he is mistakenly referred to as "Paul." Also, there are two minor characters with the same first name, Delorah. It takes a little extra mental energy to determine if these two characters are actually one and the same. They are not.

Despite a few minor missteps, *Jazzy Zigzaggin' Blues* is a wonderful story about two girls trying to figure out where they fit into the world. With keen insight into the nature of life, love, and forgiveness, this very real, emotionally raw, and riveting story is destined to be enjoyed by anyone.

LAURA MAHON (December 17, 2014)

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