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Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment

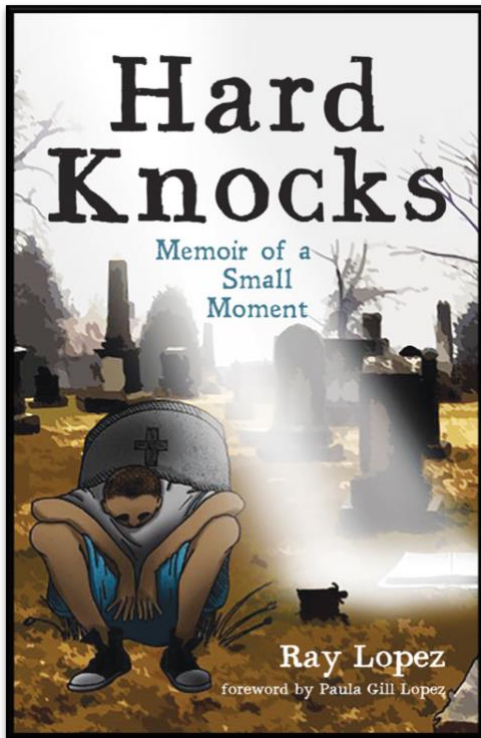
by Ray Lopez

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New Title from Ray Lopez
Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment



Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment is the story of one man's dynamic journey through life from birth until the day after his twenty-first birthday. It takes place during the 1960s and 1970s on Long Island in New York. From a Latino background, he takes us through his cultural confusion, as his parents tried to assimilate within a predominantly white community, and his confrontation with overt racism at school. It details the abusive environment he faced in Catholic school, his growing anger, and his fall into childhood alcoholism and delinquency. The Vietnam War, counterculture, and science provide a constant background for his growing awareness, choices, decisions, and delusions about the world and his own life. His alcoholism merges with drug addiction and he finds value and identity within a gang. The momentum of his life, balancing precariously between rebellious destruction and a search for artistic beauty and truth, takes the reader through the criminal justice and mental health systems, where the narrator awakens to the truth of Christ in his life.

Ray Lopez works as a mitigation specialist in capital cases after retiring from a twenty-six-year career as a federal probation officer. Born in Brooklyn in 1959 and raised on Long Island during the 1960s and 1970s, he journeyed through racism, Catholicism, counterculture, alcoholism, drug addiction, hospitalization, and jail to find hope in Christ. He earned his master's degree from UC Berkeley in English in 1988 and has only recently returned to creative writing.



Interview with Ray Lopez

What inspired you to write your first memoir?

The moment I was saved I was called to be an evangelist. God was working in my life to prepare me to serve in this capacity. At 60 years old, I am now released to write as He is ready to use my testimonies to lead people into His Kingdom.

What relevance does your book have to the world we are living in today?

There are no coincidences in God's world and the timing is perfect. My experiences with overt racism growing up in Long Island should contribute to the discussion we are now having on racism in the new pandemic world. Also, with the acceptance and focus on mental illness, the testimony of how God used it in my life will encourage those who are struggling today.

How important is scripture in the book and your life?

It is the most important thing as it is the main way in which God speaks to me. The reader will see the impact of scripture throughout the text. The hope and prayer is that it will lead others to seek God's voice in his word and apply it to their lives.

Portions of your book read like a horror novel with you fighting demons and seeing ghosts. How do you think your readers will respond?

God is real and so is Satan. The Bible has many stories of battles with demons and Christ mentions ghosts. The spiritual realm is all around us, sometimes battling within us. These stories are true and the hope and prayer is that the reader will be amazed at God's power, mercy and grace and be sober and vigilant as God instructs in 1 Peter 5:8.

What about the aspect of addiction in your life? How did it contribute to your mental illness and how did God use these things for your good.

I did a ton of drugs and was an alcoholic by the age of 10. I began struggling with depression as a young man. The enemy used this duality to try to kill me. It caused me doubt years later that I actually experienced some of the things that happened to me. Just like the resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus, although we don't need this through our faith, there is physical evidence of the resurrection of Christ. The tomb was empty. The scratches were on the wall (see Chapter-On Becoming Christ.)

What is your hope for this and your second and third memoirs which will also be published by Wipf and Stock.

My hope is that God will use all three books in a powerful way to document a lifetime of serving the Lord while experiencing all the joys, trials and tribulations. The first prophetic word I received was that I would minister to the hardcore, one at a time. I learned that hardcore is a condition of the spirit and anyone who has turned from God is hardcore. Each reader will read this book, one at a time.

An Excerpt from *Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment*

On July 31, 1978, three days after the death of my grandfather, TIME Magazine published its cover story, “The First Test- Tube Baby,” and God spoke to me. This was the anti-Christ, even if it was a she. The Bible set forth falsehood, and I would be called to set the record straight. I arrived at South Oaks Hospital in Amityville, New York, in August of 1978. I assumed there to be some link between the hospital and the Amityville Horror house; maybe Ronald DeFeo Jr. had been a patient there. I don’t know, but I knew evil lurked around the corner—and He wanted me to go there. My voice still spoke to the Universe, but I kept that to myself, as people weren’t ready to receive it. Mom and Dr. R. assured me of my voluntary resident status, allowing me to leave any time, but they conspired against me; they lied. When asked what they liked about their son, my parents could only offer that “he worked hard at building his muscles and a strong body.” They locked me up in the adolescent ward and wanted to give me drugs, which I found ironic because of all the drugs I already used. And I knew that Dr. R., an overweight, sweaty Italian guy who smoked cigarettes, was some kind of Freudian freak, because he kept asking me if I had sexual fantasies about my mother, searching for some Oedipus Complex. I knew that he fantasized about my mother, and by projecting onto me, hoped that I did and would describe mine in detail, so he could get off. I was smarter than Dr. R. I was smarter than everyone in the World, the Universe. But Dr. R. showed me the magic. We sat together in the interview room on the ward. While rock music played on the radio, he told me that I had manic depression with schizoid features, which I liked the sound of because Hendrix sang about manic depression, and I loved Hendrix. Dr. R. kept smoking the whole time, and the music kept playing; I don’t remember the song, so let’s just say it was “Manic Depression.” As smoke swirled in the air, he asked, “Do you believe in magic?” Yes. I said yes, and before I could say anything more, he pulled out a pink pill called Lithium and proclaimed, “This is magic. Watch, I’ll show you.” And he pulled out a cigarette and placed it on the table between us and started circling his finger around it, clockwise and counter clockwise, fast and faster; and then he stopped, placed his finger on my side of the table near the cigarette and slowly dragged his finger toward me—but nothing happened. So he picked it up, lit it using his lighter, took a drag, blew out three perfect smoke rings and said, “This is just a cigarette. It’s not magic.” Then, he held up the pink pill and said, “But this is magic.” He laid the pill down at the center of the table, smoke swirling, music playing, and began to make circles around the pill until he stopped and placed his finger on my side of the pill. When he moved his finger toward me, the pill followed and rolled in my direction until it was almost off the edge. It suddenly stopped, and he said, “You see, it’s magic,” and then handed me a glass of water. I swallowed the magic and knew his power, but knew he still couldn’t be trusted.

Praise for *Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment*

“Ray Lopez’s *Hard Knocks* is a stunning memoir of the seemingly inevitable destruction of a confused young man. . . . On the surface he appears to be just another casualty of addiction, but dig deeper and you’ll find another narrative, one of faith and redemption.”

—James Brown, author of *Apology to the Young Addict* and *The Los Angeles Diaries*

“Lopez writes in a sophisticated but vivid, plain style that calls attention to what’s going on in the world in which the author confronts hard knocks and gives some too. . . . *Hard Knocks* is a book of many pleasures. It is an affirmation of one’s life and one’s heritage.”

—Donald W. Markos, author of *Ideas in Things: The Poems of William Carlos Williams*

“*Hard Knocks* is a relevant story for today. Seeds of hate were sown in Ray’s young heart as he tried to navigate through a climate of racism and hate. *Hard Knocks* fully reveals the inner rage that took Ray to the precipice of self-destruction—prison and hospitalization. How does a man filled with rage, hate, and revenge become a man filled with love, especially for those caught in the same struggle?”

—Vinny Carbone, teacher, Fairfield, Connecticut

“An extremely powerful and inspirational true story of a young man, Ray Lopez, growing up on Long Island in Commack, NY, from his earliest years to age 21. The book surpasses my highest expectations and tells the story of hope, inspiration and of faith that saved his life and transformed him into the man he is today. A must read! Already looking forward to reading his second book.”

—AnneMarie R., Amazon Reviewer

