

RISING FROM THE ASHES

What the reviewers are saying...

It's just past midnight and I have just finished *Rising from the Ashes*. It's difficult to say more than "Wow!" and "Holy shit!", although I thought "Damn, Michael!" often while reading.

I found myself in tears quite often over the three hours I read your book. I was pretty impressed with your Mom. Doing what she had to do and all that jazz. I never had to go where she went, although sometimes it was close.

... it's not often I open a book and am unwilling to close it until I'm finished with it. Reading the first few chapters this morning gave me an idea about what I was in for and when the book arrived in my inbox ... had I been in a bookstore with the paper book in my hands I would have been blindly going into my carry-all and fishing out money and making a danger out of myself by reading while walking (I've chipped teeth in the past).

Thanks for sharing. Your writing astounds me.

Crystal Ordonez, author

I just read *RISING FROM THE ASHES*. Yes, it took a long time to read it but I had a particularly frantic summer when I had to do a bunch of things. Finally, today, I just took it off my bureau and said to myself, look, you're never going to get a big chunk of time to do this book justice so why not read a snippet now?

How wrong I was! I read it all in one go, a solid five hours. It was a real page-turner and I really liked it. You have excellent story-telling abilities and the narrative flowed. Obviously I have some ties to Tampa so the book was of special interest to me but looking objectively at it, that's not what kept me reading. I think it was a real window in lower-class America and I was amazed that you could pull yourself out of it. Your mother was just a really inspiring person.

Which leads me to ask: how much is fiction and how much autobiography? I sort of felt it was all autobiography, but I may have just been drawn into the authenticity of it.

Another thing I really liked was the small-child voice you had for the early part of it. You captured the innocence, blindness of that without it being some smarmy, condescending piece in a "child's voice." It read natural and I think this was a really strong point.

One other thing I forgot to say: the story was so good that I had to call my parents after that. It just had that sort of effect on me.

Ian Johnson, 2001 Pulitzer Prize winner
Berlin bureau chief, WALL STREET JOURNAL
Author of WILD GRASS, Three Stories of Change in Modern China

Funny, poignant, riveting, and heartbreaking. In *RISING FROM THE ASHES*, Michael LaRocca excels in seamlessly stirring a strong and surprisingly diverse mix of emotions in the reader. Filled with richly drawn secondary characters, this unforgettable story of two brothers and their thorny journey to manhood is one that manages to encourage a smile while simultaneously tugging at the heartstrings. An excellent read!

Daisy Dexter Dobbs, author of *SHIPPING SHARON*

Welcome to the other America. The one you don't see on Hollywood screens but which exists in reality: small-town America with some big hearted women whose stories never get told because they are not glamorous enough or don't have great endings.

Deepa Kandaswamy, winner of Preditors and Editors poll, favorite book reviewer

The author, Michael LaRocca, has lovingly written this incredibly realistic account of his life about growing up with his brother Barry and how his mother fought to raise them through countless obstacles.

I felt a kindred spirit in this author from the beginning, for my life seemed to parallel his, both in dates and time lines. I found myself saying "me too," after reading sections of the work....

I like this guy, the way he can spell out his life for us to read and devour, the way he lets us as the reader see the real side of family life in America. We follow Michael LaRocca's life from the age of two until the untimely deaths of both his brother Barry and later his Mother Jo. By the time I reached the last page of "Rising From The Ashes," I had laughed and cried along with the author.

This is a great book, a must read for single working mothers, and for their sons who have faced hell and come back to tell about it.

Terri Campbell, *Linear Reflections*

The statement on the inside cover says this is a work of fiction, but as a reader I find that hard to accept. This book has the ring of truth about it as it recounts the miseries of childhood as lived by two brothers. *Rising From The Ashes* reveals in all its awful starkness the poverty and familial instability, as seen through the eyes of a boy.

Rising From The Ashes is not an easy read as it pulls at the reader, daring you to care about a boy who has managed to reach manhood, but will carry the scars of his youth forever. It dares you to step into the shoes of a youth, to live his life, and come through unscathed. It asks if you could survive the tragedies he endured. This book also teaches, to those who would learn, that the sins of the parents will affect and haunt their children.

The very talented author shows what life was like in North Carolina in the 1960s, as he details in vivid description the schools and homes, the small cities where the LaRocca family moved as their circumstances changed. He shows us, with a child's frank honesty, the pain and sorrow he felt when the men in his mother's life beat on her, or his stoic acceptance of the sometimes unpleasant things she had to do so they could survive.

Yet, there is deep and abiding love in this story. It leavens the hardness of their lives and rubs the rough edges off the coarseness of their surroundings. If you are someone who enjoys a challenge, a tale with a strong message, a well-crafted story by a talented writer, then this is a book for you. I highly recommend Rising From The Ashes, as a book you won't soon forget.

Anne K. Edwards, eBook Reviews Weekly, Author of "Journey Into Terror"

RISING FROM THE ASHES is a story about a brave mother and her two sons. Overcoming child abuse, rape, spousal abuse, alcoholism, and losing the love of her life, the strong-willed mother raised her boys the best she knew how. The story reads clear and precise. Since the book is based on fact, the dialogue, setting and characters wound themselves together perfectly -- giving the reader a terrifically written read.

It was hard for me to stop reading this wonderful book just so I could do everyday household things. Dinner was late, I burnt the tater tots and corn dogs just finishing the last chapter. I loved it. It stirred my emotions into a pile and swirled them around until I felt completely satisfied in the end -- I loved it! I laughed, cheered and cried. There is nothing like a good book to bring out all these emotions in one setting!

Michael LaRocca is a terrific writer who puts his heart into everything he writes. His work is not to be missed. This reviewer highly recommends RISING FROM THE ASHES by Michael LaRocca.

Jennifer LB Leese, Children's Book Review Columnist

Michael and Barry LaRocca's childhood is fraught with abusive stepparents, but life is somewhat stabilized by the apparent love of their mother, Jo. The boys take the ups and downs (more downs) in dysfunctional family situations as only children can -- in fear, humiliation, and a sense of helplessness. But Jo -- in and out of one relationship after another -- struggles to raise her boys safely... at times, as a single parent.

From North Carolina to Florida, Michael and Barry see Jo beaten and taken advantage of by several men. The brothers learn to rely on humor, pride, lies and theft to survive the abusive relationships and abundant relocations from one home to another. Barry even steals from his mother. But Barry, knowing his mom might one day need the money, hoards the stolen cash. When the threesome are on the verge of yet another eviction, the hidden money sees the family unit through another hardship. The love between mother and sons has them conquer many obstacles as the boys grow to adulthood. But as Michael learns, love can't conquer Death.

Michael LaRocca autobiographically narrates this fictionalized tale of his mother, brother and himself. Childhood emotions, like joy, jealousy, sadness, hate and sympathy are strongly emphasized by Mr. LaRocca's exceptional writing skills. **RISING FROM THE ASHES** is about a boy that lived in the scarring fires of a dysfunctional upbringing, to a man that dusted the ashes off and wrote about the flames and dying embers. That takes perseverance and lots of guts. Michael LaRocca has both, as evidenced in **RISING FROM THE ASHES**. Although the book is written mainly from a child's point of view, **RISING FROM THE ASHES** is an adult read. I highly recommend **RISING FROM THE ASHES** for anyone seeking an emotionally impacting novel about family unity and undying love.

Patricia Spork, Freelance Writer and Photographer

Rating: 5 stars out of 5

Rising from the Ashes is a story of heartache and the strength of one family. This story touched my heart in so many ways. I cried and I laughed.

Elaine Leite, Timeless Tales