

Possessed

By Philip J. Crowley and Kenneth C. Wylie, published by Sunstone Press (2013), softcover, 279 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by John R. Runyan

"Like I said, Iris. Don't worry. All that stuff about possession. Sounds like someone has seen too many old horror movies. Anyhow, I don't want to possess you...I just want to love you the rest of my life." (p 32)

Possessed, which takes place in Michigan during the 1970s, is written by Michigan natives Philip J. Crowley and Kenneth C. Wylie. Crowley served as Kalkaska County prosecuting attorney in the '70s and early '80s and now practices in Tampa, Florida. Wylie, a freelance writer and the author of several books, received a PhD in African history from Michigan State University and taught there and at Wayne State University as well as in New York City.

Crowley and Wylie tell the tragic story of Iris Crandall Harris. The book begins with Iris's marriage to Rodney Harris, a man she had known for only three months. At 38 and with two failed relationships (one marriage, one long-term affair) under her belt, Iris was beginning to wonder if she would ever find a "suitable" companion.

Along came Rodney Harris. Though he was 54, Rodney seemed almost too good to be true. Iris liked "his viral good looks, his crinkly, weathered face, the way his eyes twinkled when he laughed, his air of confidence and experience." It didn't hurt that he was "a powerful man, dark haired and well-muscled...his sinewy wrists evidence of the strength in his long arms." Rodney was also a skillful, if selfish, lover.

Following a honeymoon sightseeing in Washington, D.C., and a stop at Cedar Point, the couple returned to Rodney's farm near the small Michigan town of Ionia. The first sign of trouble occurred shortly after, when Iris's car was vandalized on the morning of

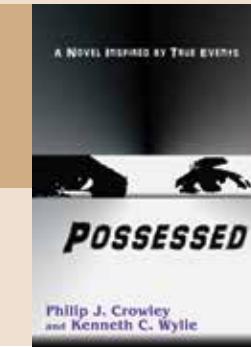
her interview for a full-time teaching position. Iris never suspected Rodney, who gave every sign of fully supporting her desire to continue the teaching career she had interrupted during their whirlwind courtship.

Crowley and Wylie masterfully set the stage for the horrific events that follow. Despite the fact that the hot-tempered, intensely possessive, and physically abusive Rodney begins to emerge, his smooth talk and amorous nature quell Iris's rising doubts. It soon

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becomes apparent, however, that Iris is not the only one with past failed relationships; she receives warning calls and a visit from one of Rodney's many ex-wives, who still bears the physical scars of his abuse. But Rodney is able to explain away even this unmistakable evidence of his Jekyll-and-Hyde personality, successfully painting his ex-wife as mentally deranged, beguiling Iris yet again. The reader is left begging for Iris to "wake up and smell the coffee."

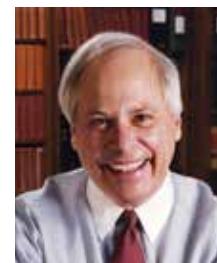
Rodney's possession and isolation of Iris become even more pronounced when they retreat to his Kalkaska County cabin, first only on weekends and, later, permanently. Although she briefly escapes Rodney's destructive orbit on a few occasions—once swearing out a complaint against him for assault and battery and twice filing for divorce—his gravitational pull is simply too



powerful for Iris, a lonely and submissive woman with substantial insecurities. Despite an escalating pattern of violence, Iris repeatedly succumbs to Rodney's pleas for forgiveness and assurances that he will seek treatment and change, until the fateful day when she can finally take no more.

Sadly, *Possessed* is described as "a novel inspired by true events." The story bears a slight resemblance to *The Burning Bed*, a nonfictional account of a battered housewife written by Faith McNulty, which also took place in mid-Michigan and later became a made-for-TV movie starring the late Farrah Fawcett. Like *The Burning Bed*, *Possessed* culminates in a criminal trial that is equally well told.

The authors do an exceptional job of bringing Iris and Rodney to life. Rodney's voluptuous secretary and paramour, Sally, who plays a pivotal role in the criminal trial, also convincingly comes to life. The character development of the judge, attorneys, and lead investigator in the criminal trial is equally well done. Fortunately, the criminal justice system, which appears rather anemic in dealing with the problems of spousal abuse early in the book, is redeemed in the end. Because it takes a critical look at our profession's ability to respond to domestic violence, *Possessed* is a book well worth reading, if not possessing. ■



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