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My Friend Felix and the Egghead and I: A Memoir

Set in the American South, this boxing memoir begins in late April of 1945, in Lake Charles, Louisiana, just before the end of the war in Europe. It ends two years later in a hot and humid high school boxing ring on Mississippi's gulf coast. In the interim, the writer explores the potential for darkness in the human heart, as well as the ironic conflict between innocence and entitlement. Propaganda and prejudice as well as bigotry and bias rear their ugly heads, but that aside, this is really a memoir of wonder and love more than hate, and deliverance more than condemnation.

As the title implies, the characters in this reminiscence are limited to three. One, of course, is the narrator, a skinny, awkward and somewhat reluctant pugilist trapped by ironic circumstances in a corner of his father's eye. His mentor in the manly art of self-defense is Corporal Felix Mettler, 5th Panzer Division, and a boy only a little older than himself. Felix is a German prisoner of war and survivor of Hitler's ill-fated North African campaign. The third character is kleptomaniac Ronnie Bird, a southerner who, despite being a neighbor boy, was as spiritually homeless as those we see in the streets today are. But his noun of direct address in this memoir is "Egghead." There is nothing in the least cryptic about Ronnie's nickname; the curvature of his head is classically ovate. What also is ovate is the curve of his hatred for "niggers, northerners, and Nazis in that order." But while the Egghead's hatred is destructive, it is also an important primer in the education of the narrator.

The memoir itself backs up to a short opening discussion on the tricky business of writing across time. The preface also addresses the question: should the memoir be allowed a place in categorical presentations at NASSH? Citing contemporary American historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and classical German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, the author attempts to support acceptance of the reminiscence: landscapes of recollection, if you will, that the celebrated Rilke defined as "those jewels beyond all price."