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Ybor City Chronicles: A Memoir



Synopsis

"As anyone knows who tunes him in on national TV as 'The Fight Doctor,' Ferdie Pacheco is a world-class spellbinder. But catching that verbal magic on a page is a rare gift. The proof is in the reading of this racy, vivid, evocative page-turner, as much fun to read as Ferdie had living it in this unique Cuban enclave, a world unto itself that he re-creates for us in Pachecoese, a lingua franca of the spirit."--Budd Schulberg

"Ferdie Pacheco takes us to a vanished time and place, full of affectionate laughter, the invincible optimism of immigrants, and the delicious aroma of good cigars. He makes all of us wish we'd grown up in Ybor City."--Pete Hamill

"Pure pleasure. Pacheco brings an enormous talent to this task. A renaissance man, he is perhaps best known as Muhammad Ali's physician, but he has also distinguished himself as a general practitioner serving Miami's inner city, a prominent boxing commentator, an accomplished artist, and a remarkable raconteur. It is the last quality that drives Ybor City Chronicles."--Gary R. Mormino, University of South Florida

With his gift for storytelling, Ferdie Pacheco stirs a gust of cigar smoke into the hot steam of *café con leche* and creates the magic of this lighthearted memoir. His stage is Ybor City, the colorful immigrant community on the edge of Tampa, and the time is 1935-45--the decade when Pacheco grew up and the community he loves outgrew its ethnic splendor. Pacheco's respect for words began the day his story starts, when ten-year-old Ferdie climbs into a truck with Sweet Sam to deliver pharmaceuticals for La Economica, the family chemist shop. Along with prescription drugs, homeopathic "nerve" remedies, and laxatives, Sam totes a book of poetry and a dictionary, and before the day is out he prevails upon Ferdie to look up "procrastinate." "Succulent" and "delectable" follow. Pacheco writes with the sentimentality of a Latin lover and the instincts of a stand-up comic. At the heart of his story is the fabled Columbia Restaurant, where he worked as a teen-age waiter for two summers--a job with status in Ybor City equal to that of being a New York Yankee ballplayer, he says. Its glamorous doors opened fifteen hours a day to the community's characters, and they become folk heroes under Pacheco's affectionate scrutiny: Pepe Lu Babo, the idiot savant of newspaper circulation; Chef Pijuan, who asked to have a menu buried with him when he died; Pan con Chinchas ("Bread and Bedbugs"), who had once been a lector in a cigar factory; Don Victoriano Manteiga, the resident intellectual who founded La Gaceta, the trilingual newspaper published today by his son Roland; and Dr. José Avellanal, who experimented with cryogenics on stray cats and practiced law, plastic surgery, gynecology, the ministry, and higher education, all from his "office" in the hotel El Pasaje. Though Pacheco describes years spanning the Great Depression and World War II, his days then were blissfully contained by his Spanish/Cuban/Italian enclave.

After school he visited his abuelita, the grandmother who fixed him cups of thick hot chocolate and reminded him that science was more important than art if he wanted to become a doctor. He went to western movies in splendid air-conditioned theaters on Saturday and, in his teen years, to tea dances at ethnic social clubs on Sunday. On fine days, the yellow trolley--known as the "jewel of Tampa Electric" for its wicker seats and lacquered wood interior--took him to picnics at nearby Sulphur Springs. With no excuses for the past, he recalls that his father, J.B., woke each morning to the sight of his wife standing by his bedside with his cup of Cuban coffee in her hand, ready to help him on with his shoes, and that J.B. ended every evening in the cool cellar of the Centro Asturiano club, smoking cigarettes, playing cards, drinking a last cup of espresso. Ybor City Chronicles includes vintage photographs and Pacheco's own cartoons, sketches, and paintings, many never before published, and an epilogue by Ybor City historian Tony Pizzo, who describes the features that today make Ybor City a National Historic Monument. Ferdie Pacheco, M.D., is the author of the novel *Renegade Lightning* and of two books of nonfiction, *Muhammad Ali: A View from the Corner* and *Fight Doctor*, an account of his life as a physician in the fight world. He practiced medicine from 1958 to 1980 and served as Muhammad Ali's personal physician from 1963 to 1977. In recent years, he has served as boxing color commentator for NBC-TV, Showtime, and Univision. In 1990 he received an Emmy for writing, producing, and narrating the NBC special "Ali Wins the Title." He is also a painter and has exhibited one-person shows in London, Paris, New York, Miami (where he now lives), and other cities throughout the United States.

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Customer Reviews

Pacheco (Fight Doctor), who is now a color commentator for boxing on TV, was Muhammad Ali's personal physician from 1963 to 1977. This captivating memoir, however, contains nothing about the fight game, but recalls growing up in Ybor City, the Hispanic enclave of Tampa, from 1935 to 1945, when the nation was coming out of the Depression and fighting WWII. Pacheco's self-described "light-hearted reminiscence" is full of memorable characters, most of them more Spanish or Cuban in their attitudes and mores than mainstream American. It portrays relatives, friends and storied eccentrics, including the author's pharmacist father, J.B., the absolute master of the house, tough and demanding but also loving and supportive. Pacheco, an artist as well as a physician, supplements the many photos here with numerous delightful drawings. The result is a most appealing volume. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Don't be misled by Chronicles in the title; this is Pacheco's lively, perceptive account of his teen years (1935-45) in the Tampa, Florida, area. Ybor City's inhabitants were mostly Spanish, Cuban, and Italian, and most of them seemed to be involved in the cigar and restaurant businesses. Pacheco tells about the lecturers or readers in the cigar factories, who often played the roles of city intellectuals. And talk about an extended family! The term is an understatement when applied to the endless grandparents, aunts and uncles, and more-or-less cousins that keep popping up as movie ushers, waiters, and general supporters for those in need. Further, Pacheco's word pictures of and deeply felt comments on his abuelita (grandmother) will be remembered by virtually every reader. Pacheco's layered career as pharmacist, physician, artist, writer, and TV star began at the University of Tampa--briefly because "what the university lacked in scholastic talent, it could never make up in athletics." Pacheco's drawings and paintings as well as photos add delightful definition and atmosphere to his recollections. William Beatty

Ferdie Pacheco's Ybor City Chronicles, A Memoir reminded me of Ybor City's famed Cuban bread loaves from La Segunda Central Bakery- Crusty on the outside, yet soft, warm and filling on the inside. His true to life memoir has its hard, crusty edges when it details the deaths of Ybor City founders and characters. He balances this by giving us details of the loving, trusting, yet proud feelings of the many Ybor City founders had toward their young children and families. This book contains many rare photographs of many Ybor City founders and their families as well as sketches

by Ferdie Pacheco himself. Though the individual essays contain excellent characterizations, I wish the book had been written in a more chronological order as it can become unwieldy trying to keep all the founding families and historical events in order. I would recommend this book for those who want a peek at a multicultural, self started city-within-a city during the depression era that was Ybor City.

If you have interest in Ybor City (a highly cultural section of Tampa), you ought to give this book a read. Lots of neat stories and tidbits about the area, the cigar industry, and Ybor's heritage. Even today, Ybor City still exudes that same Cuban & cigar culture that Tampa was built on. Ybor's a Tampa treasure that's been preserved, and it's a very proud part of the bay area.

Excellent! Having recently visited the city, the book brought it to life, Each culture is so rich unto itself! America is such a great melting pot!!

It is everything I expected and then some. I will definitely order another one if this one gets damaged, lost or broken.

I am a native to the Tampa area and have family members who had very strong ties to Ybor City in "the day". Ybor City enjoys an extremely diverse and interesting history. The book captures the diversity of cultures and people of Old Ybor. Ybor City is now known more for its "entertainment" but the very rich heritage of the town should be perpetuated. This book is a wonderful way of getting a glimpse of life during that time. As the author states in the front of the book, It is "his truth". Having been exposed to the culture, I know what he says is true. This book is by no means a dry documentary. It is almost a collection of vignettes. Definitely worth the read.

I know a good book when I read one. Ybor City Chronicles is an excellent one. This book delivers a fresh new look at Ybor City that no one has ever seen before! It is comical and serious, yet it still gives you an inside look to the city of Ybor. In addition, it provides wonderful profiles of Ybor's most powerful people. Once I read this novel I honestly felt like I knew so much more about the city I grew up in (Tampa/Ybor). I recommend this book to anyone who wants a new perspective of this sun-bathed city.

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