

A Little Consideration

Richard Ehrlich

AuthorHouse

978-1-4634-4389-4

Richard Ehrlich is an observer and a thinker. He is sensitive, easily moved to tears, and quick to share his feelings. He loves his family. He is a loyal friend and a dedicated teacher. And he is quite willing to open up his life to others in this compilation of sixty-six personal essays—recollections of and reflections on his family, friends, and Jewish faith.

A Little Consideration documents events meaningful to Ehrlich—building a play fort with his brother, running a marathon, the death of a special pet. He incorporates the lessons learned from each experience, such as not judging others by appearance and how to hold on to one's passion. It is a gentle book, not a tell-all confessional. Ehrlich philosophizes at times, and his glass-half-full approach to life always shines through.

The eclectic stories, strung together loosely in chronological order, have a blog-like quality. Some feel a bit unformed, as if they are not quite ready for publication. Ehrlich seems to still be developing his thoughts as he writes, still struggling to find answers to the questions he poses. "I don't know what particular connections to make here; there are so many," he states in an essay about the family dog. Some readers might be willing to wander with him, but others will prefer the focus to be tighter. On the other hand, a few essays feel forced in their closure, as if the author tried too hard to bring them full circle.

There is a subtle self-consciousness in the writing that reveals itself occasionally when Ehrlich directly addresses his audience—sometimes his parents and friends, sometimes general readers—as if they sit before him, listening. There are also odd essays where he admonishes the family of a friend for not understanding his needs, or writes from the point of view of another.

Personal essays are, of course, subjective, both for the writer who shapes the words to fit his experience, and for the readers who filter the words through their own subjective lenses, looking for deeper understanding, a new truth. In these homespun tales, readers may nod in recognition, but Ehrlich's stories lack the powerful universal punch that would elevate his audience to a new level of awareness about the world.

Still, Ehrlich writes well and has a knack for expressing feelings memorably, as he does in this ending to an essay on the dangers in today's world: "But late at night, my boys asleep and the moon pouring its soft, silent light on our one perfect sphere, the distant discord melts away; everything here is calm: it feels like all we need to meet the coming storms are deep faith and warm pajamas."

It is the author's positive outlook that will charm readers and perhaps even comfort them. The world is a beautiful place as seen through Ehrlich's eyes.

RUTH DOUILLETTE (February 9, 2012)

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