Clarion Review

A Thousand Autumns
C.C. Southerland Jr.
BookSurge
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Based on Southerland's own experiences during the war, A Thousand Autumns continues the tales of Gabe McCarthy, a gifted medic serving in a Special Forces unit during the conflict in Vietnam. His training and intuitive healing abilities endear him to the circle of people in his unit and the Montagnards, a native group in Vietnam, helping the US fight the war.

Like Southerland's previous book, De Opresso Liber, A Thousand Autumns is chock full of details about life in the Special Forces during the war. When Gabe grabs his medicine bag, the reader learns about all the medicines it contains, almost down to how many CCs are in the vials. In some sections, Southerland details military protocol and procedure so well that you almost expect the page to be stamped "classified."

But something has changed in Southerland's writing style between his first and second books. In De Opresso Liber, the sheer amount of detail seemed to weigh down a set of stories that were gripping, endearing, and sometimes even light-hearted. In A Thousand Autumns, it's clear that Southerland has learned to balance the breadth of his experiences in the field with the rhythm of fictional characters and their world.

For instance, in the chapter, "Friendship and Retribution," we learn the story of Ca Rangh, a young Montagnard woman who plays a significant role in Gabe's life. Searching for her husband, she runs into Vietnamese soldiers and their attack brings her under Gabe's care. While Ca's story is heartbreaking, it shows Southerland's wonderful sense of humanity (even when the theme is difficult) without relying on obsessive military detail to tell the story.

Although there are parts of A Thousand Autumns where more description of the lush, but dangerous countryside or the Montagnard villages would be nice, the shift in Southerland's style is an interesting and exciting jump forward. While readers became acquainted with Gabe in De Opresso Liber, his stories are more compelling in A Thousand Autumns as Southerland finds his stride as an author. He crafts a series of stories around Gabe that are captivating, sometimes heart-wrenching, but always believable; the result is extremely rewarding.

Like De Opresso Liber, this novel is ideal for military or history buffs looking for a good story on the Vietnam era.

Katerie Prior