

An Island of Lost Toys

Robert L. Kerzic

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We are each the product of a long line of decisions made by previous generations. Nationality, careers, spouses, children—for better or worse, all aspects of our lives have been influenced by the paths taken by our ancestors.

Bobby Shannon is no different. Though he now owns a beach house on Dauphin Island and has a well-padded bank account, his grandfather, originally from the province of Slovenia, began life in America with very little money in his pocket. Franz Ludwig, who later became Frank Shannon, fled Slovenia after an unfortunate incident in the Emperor's Army. He worked in the mines all his life, first in Germany, then in Pittsburgh, and finally in Alabama where he could finally afford to bring his wife and children over from their family home in Borovnica.

One of his sons, Lou Shannon, ends up a doctor with a family of his own living near Birmingham, Alabama. Bobby, his oldest son, tries to follow in his father's footsteps but finds the lure of football, girls, and parties to be too tempting, and doesn't quite make the grades for medical school. Instead, he joins the Marine Corps and embarks on a career filled with medals, friends, near escapes, and success.

Bobby finds success in other areas of his life as well. After a rocky interruption, he marries his high school sweetheart, Mary Ann, and they have three children. In the midst of a happy marriage, tragedy strikes and Bobby must find new ways to cope with his myriad of responsibilities. One of his coping techniques is to marry the first girl he ever kissed—a marriage based more on mutual convenience than passionate love.

An Island of Lost Toys reads more like a family history than a novel. Robert L. Kerzic is talented at delving into the details of lives that were lived over a hundred years ago. For instance, he deftly describes the items Franz is required to purchase for his work in the mines: "His equipment—a hardhat with a kerosene lamps, two pairs of overalls, a crescent wrench, an auger, two boxes of matches, a 'packing rod' and a pair of leather gloves cost him ten marks; an entire week's wages that he had not earned yet!"

The story moves along at an entertaining pace; Kerzic manages to convey important details without slowing the plot for the sake of description. However, the dialogue often feels forced and the drama, especially toward the end of the novel, sometimes comes across as more convenient than realistic. Kerzic also relies heavily on exclamation points to convey a sense of urgency, humor, or shock. And readers may wonder at the lack of villains in this book; every character appears to have a good heart, even the abusive corporal who caused Franz and his friend to flee Slovenia in the first place.

Despite several problems with the writing, An Island of Lost Toys is an entertaining read, especially for those who like family epics.

ANDI DIEHN (May 18, 2010)

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