

Because I Believed in Me: My Egyptian Fantasy Came True

Randi D. Ward

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Randi Ward's memoir *Because I Believed in Me* would make a wonderful, upbeat, and uplifting Lifetime Network-esque movie. This tale of a retired English teacher from Atlanta being "reborn" and having "the greatest experience of [her] life" is utterly charming and an absolute joy to read.

It is impossible to read this book without having a broad smile on one's face. Ward's enthusiasm for her experiences in Egypt, first as a tourist and later as a teacher of English in Cairo, is infectious. Although she does gush and bubble over with cheer in describing her days in Egypt and the friends she made while there, the sentiment is so genuine that her deep affection for these people jumps out from the pages. That after thirty-eight years as an English teacher Ward found a new and fulfilling life doing what she loves best will resonate with any retiree, although few will have the courage, the means, or the sheer gumption to go off on his or her own to find that in a foreign land, and one in the midst of revolution no less.

Although almost all of the twenty-eight chapters are packed with happy memories and descriptions of wonderful people and exciting adventures, Ward was in Egypt during a time of turmoil. One chapter deals with a particularly frightening night during what became known as the Second Revolution, and the events of that evening, Ward freely admits, still give her nightmares. While most people, especially those on their own far from home, left Egypt when faced with the upheaval and violence of that time, Ward stayed on. She kept on teaching through it and became even closer to her many Egyptian friends during that difficult period.

That every person she met is a "dear friend" or a "close friend" or made her "feel so loved" would normally strain the credulity of the reader, Ward seems to be that all-too-rare kind of person who probably truly feels that way about people—especially those she met in Egypt, most of whom she remains in contact with on Facebook. They are a diverse and delightful lot that includes male and female students, artists, engineers, doctors, mothers, children, and even an Arabic rapper as well as a British subject of Egyptian extraction who is planting a Peace Forest outside of Cairo.

The book is lavishly illustrated with photographs. In nearly all of them, Ward is not only smiling from ear to ear but actually beaming with love, happiness, and joy, as are the other people in the images. There are some shots of Ward on a camel, visiting the pyramids, shopping, and even attending a Chinese festival and a wedding. As touristy as they are, these pictures complement and reinforce the story and the emotions Ward felt.

This is not great literature or an in-depth view of life abroad, and while the writing is loose, it is correct and it is real. Ward's story would make a delightful film, if anyone has the vision to grab it up for a studio or a cable channel.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (May 16, 2013)

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