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Autobiography & Memoir

Builder's Apprentice
Andrew J. Hoffman
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Imagine waving goodbye to your nine-to-five job—that world of expectation and routine—and setting off after dreams that thrill and fulfill you. In 1986, Andrew Hoffman did all this and more. He left behind a promising career in chemical engineering, rejected acceptances into graduate programs at Harvard and Berkeley, and jumped headfirst into a carpentry job in Nantucket. His memoir, *Builder's Apprentice*, is both a record of his foray into the world of high-end custom home building and a refreshingly honest reflection on the complexities of realizing one's dreams.

Structuring his narrative into four sections that symbolize the levels of a monastic order, Hoffman guides readers through a spiritual progression. As an "Aspirant," Hoffman leaves his life in Boston and joins a construction crew in Nantucket, eagerly acquiring a solid set of carpentry skills. While in "Discernment," Hoffman returns to the "real" world of office jobs and paperwork only to realize that his hunger to create something real and lasting is far from satiated. With his happiness awaiting him among hammers and nails in Nantucket, Hoffman leads us through the levels of "Novice" and "Senior," where he struggles with the overwhelming responsibility of constructing two colossal estates for a set of demanding owners.

The author of seven previous nonfiction books and a professor of Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Michigan, this memoir is Hoffman's first creative effort. This book offers up a rich buffet of literary material: a gritty account of the lives of blue-collar workers, an exhilarating glimpse into an elite world in which forty thousand dollars buys top-of-the-line mahogany doors, the tension-wrought management of confusing new relationships, and most compelling of all—a coming-of-age story in which a young man is brave enough to do what we all desire: he summons the courage to leave behind the comfort of stability to face an uncertain but exciting future.

Although detailed passages dedicated to the technical aspects of construction can

distance the reader, honest moments of realization delivered in a fluid narrative style compel the reader's interest in Hoffman's story. At the outset, Hoffman expresses a deeply held, very relatable fear: "I was afraid to do what I wanted to do and was doing instead what I was expected to do." Hoffman's ability to pinpoint universal issues in an authorial voice that is both earnest and genuine makes for a book that is accessible and intriguing. This will be a welcome read for anyone eager to discover their true calling.

Shoilee Khan