

Expatriate Adventures

Fred Richardson

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Expat recalls his life and times caught between many worlds.

In *Expatriate Adventures*, Fred Richardson chronicles his life as a child in China from 1926 to 1940, and then as an adult working as an insurance executive in Cuba, Venezuela, and Guatemala in the 1950s and 1960s. Richardson, now in his eighties, captures the sometimes transcendent and sometimes mundane slices of the world of expatriates in this book, which is peppered with grainy photographs. The author's exceptionally detailed recollections would appeal to others who lived and worked in those countries, or in the early years of the insurance industry.

The first part of the book, wherein Richardson writes about his early life in China, is entertaining. As the only child of two adventurous and happily married parents, Richardson's obvious joy in reminiscing about his heady youth is a pleasure to read. His happy family immersed themselves in the multicultural smorgasbord of Shanghai's large and varied international community of Russian Bolsheviks, European Jews, French, English, and American businesspeople, plus a smattering of many others whose touching and unusual stories are skillfully chronicled.

Richardson captures this microcosm of China between the two world wars beautifully, from Sunday afternoon excursions to still-smoldering battlefields where the family searches for souvenirs, to the unique aspects of having one's clothing and shoes made by a tailor who does house calls, to the singular ins and outs of schooling, food, money, friendships, and servants.

The second part of *Expatriate Adventures*, which stretches from 1953 to 1969, opens with a grown Richardson, newly hired by American International Underwriters, moving with his wife and young daughter to pre-Castro Cuba. Within two years, the growing family moves to Venezuela, then back to the United States for several years, then to Guatemala for Richardson's final gig as an expat.

Expatriate Adventures does a good job of sharing the interesting culture, geography, and politics of these three countries, but an inordinate amount of energy is spent recording the names and occupations of what seems like everyone Richardson knew, coupled with the details of their interactions. The book also slogs through a great deal of information on the inner workings of the nascent insurance industry. An almost constant dissatisfaction with his job and colleagues adds a depressing edge to the memoir.

When he writes about his wife and children, who number four by the end of the book, Richardson is at his best. The family's many sightseeing trips and the children's adventures with friends and schooling are highlights.

Expatriate Adventures ends abruptly, with the family packing to leave Guatemala for their return to the United States. An epilogue sharing the highlights of the family members' lives over the next forty years would have gone a long way toward offering closure.

The volume does sport an attractive cover and obvious care was taken with the organization and editing. Libraries and bookstores that cater to an elderly population would be an appropriate venue for this memoir.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (September 27, 2013)

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