ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

Into the Okavango: The Africa Poems and Photographs
Marianne Harding Bugoyne
Marianne Harding Burgoyne, photographer
Robert H. Burgoyne, photographer
Burgoyne and Burgoyne
978-0-9742183-0-4
Three Stars (out of Five)

For Westerners, Africa remains a place of mystery, with shades of rich wildlife and open land the world once had in abundance. Burgoyne's book of poems and photographs about her dream trip to Africa, originally postponed due to her cat's fatal illness, attempts to capture a romantic view of the areas visited and highlight their internal poetry.

The large format coffee table book is made of high quality materials, though the layout is similar to a scrapbook, with many photos cropped into circles, along with many of the author and her husband. There are no captions, just a complicated key in the corners that provide brief information and photographer credit. Organized by location, this personal, pictorial journal follows the Burgoyne's route: Savuti, Khwai, Chobe, Victoria Falls (where the hotel was the main event), Hwange (where they had three flat tires in two days and the danger it put them in), Lake Kariba, and Cape Point (primarily devoted to a young girl the author didn't know but became enamored of).

There are, of course, photos of wildlife and local crafts, as well as unexpected others of luggage, jewelry from the Burgoyne's private collection, and even hotel sinks. Unfortunately many are grainy and slightly blurry, while others seem meaningful only to those on the trip. Also included are photos of the Burgoyne family cats, which the author admits was "the biggest risk I have taken with this book." Though her aim to show a connection between the behavior of wild cats and her own is genuine, including such photos, especially of their cats' tombstones, further sets the book with competing purposes.

Burgoyne's observational poems appear throughout, centering on her love for animals. One, "Into the Okavango," captures the look and activities of animals and rivers, arguing for it to "remain untouched." Another offers an ode to a bath, and the Land Rover they used is a too common feature: a guide "stopped / the Land Rover," "the impala moved slowly / in front of the

Land Rover," (Still Life) and again later, "Deep in the heart of Chobe / Killer stopped the Land Rover." (Lion Pride) Framed as free verse, the poems read more like prose journal entries. And though they do well bringing to life one woman's experiences, they are rendered in a decorative script that makes them difficult to read. The best are a few haiku in the middle, such as "Females in estrus / baboons mate, taking pleasure / in naked daylight."

Ultimately Burgoyne's book is a labor of love; the acknowledgements point directly to its fostering healing of past disappointments and deaths of loved ones. So many personal elements, however, make it more a scrapbook of a private journey than an offering for the broader public.

Christine Thomas