

★ Invisible People: Stories of Lives at the Margins

Alex Tizon

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The journalist Alex Tizon had a goal: to bring to visibility those “who existed outside the mainstream’s field of vision.” He felt that everyone had a story, and he wanted to help people tell it. That’s exactly what *Invisible People* does. Taken from publications including *The Atlantic* and the *Seattle Times*, this is a wide-ranging collection of stories about outsiders.

The book’s standout piece is Tizon’s National Magazine Award-winning article, “My Family’s Slave,” in which he details the life and work of Lola, a woman who was, essentially, his family’s slave for fifty-six years. Tizon examines the dynamics of his own family and each person’s relationship with Lola, especially his own, particularly when he brings her to live with his family as an adult.

In “Thom Jones and the Cosmic Joke,” Tizon profiles an ex-janitor who had a story published in *The New Yorker* and found success as an instructor at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and as a Guggenheim fellow, though all that still couldn’t bring happiness, it seemed. The post-9/11 piece “On Edge” brings the audience right back to those early days after the attacks, when rugged patriotism reigned. Tizon went to a small town in Wyoming that was 98 percent white to interview a Muslim family, and though the resulting piece is cautiously optimistic, reading it now brings a sense of foreboding. In a section labeled “Villains,” Tizon explores the Beltway snipers’ stories and backgrounds, seeking a possible reason for what they did, and covers the fallout from a gang-related drive-by shooting.

Tizon’s talent was in seeking out those with stories to tell outside of the mainstream: those who don’t quite fit in, whether because of their race, religion, ethnicity, or lifestyle. Easy answers don’t exist in *Invisible People*; each piece leaves the audience a little bit unsettled, wanting more. The collection may focus on those who are invisible, but Tizon’s writing was anything but.

JAIME HERNDON (November / December 2019)

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