ForeWord Reviews

TRAVEL

Journey Man: A World Calling
William Claassen
Cornel & Williams
978-0-615-60848-8
(August 2012)

William Claassen takes readers on a journey that spans thirty years, nine countries, and four continents in his travel memoir, *Journey Man: A World Calling*, and though his book has an ample share of odd and outlandish characters, beautiful but tormented places, and exciting, and sometimes tragic, events, it is more than a collection of various travel tales. It is, above all, the story of the author's transformation from the long-haired, long-distance hitchhiker with a lust for adventure that he was in the 1970s to the mature spiritual seeker he became by the time his book closes, some thirty years later.

Journey Man is travel writing at its best—honest, gritty, informative, and inspiring. Claassen never casts himself as a heroic figure; things just seem to happen, and he just happens to be there when they do. From his time on a 1970s-era Israeli kibbutz to a cross-country hitchhiking adventure from New York to Alaska to being caught in the midst of a revolution in Nicaragua and having a near brush with death in an El Salvador earthquake to the experience of stifling military surveillance in 1980s Guatemala, Claassen details not just the outer events and their causes, but the inner events that shaped the man he was becoming, casting light on his character and revealing the depth to which he was willing to go in search of the truth.

Claassen also explores world spirituality through his encounters with Mayan healers in Guatemala, Turkish whirling dervishes, Japanese Zen monks, Thai Buddhist masters, a temple dancer in India, and Native American peyote ceremonies in California, and he does so as a participant, rather than as a mere observer, bringing the traditions to life for the reader.

The author has lived a full, rich life. Raised in Kansas, his various occupations had him engaging in community organizing in the South, stage acting in the East, planting trees in the Northwest, working with Amnesty International, and doing development work abroad. He is also the author of two other books, *Alone in Community: Journeys into Monastic Life Around the World*, and *Another World: A Retreat in the Ozarks*. His wide-ranging interests have taken him to more than forty countries and five continents, and, for this, his newest work, he has selected those experiences which have most shaped the man he has become.

Claassen's work merits proofreading to correct substantial errors, among which are two different spellings of the Persian poet Rumi's name. Even so, his writing, marked by wry good humor, a journalist's eye for detail, and an artist's capacity for awe, brings far-flung lands to life in stories that amaze and inspire.

Kristine Morris