ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Lost Then Found
Jeff Morgan
AuthorHouse
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Jeff Morgan has written a deceptively simple, short tale about hiking the Appalachian Trail, one that is rich in detail and meaning.

While *Lost Then Found* is a work of fiction, Morgan draws heavily from his experiences as a long-distance hiker. “All of the characters in this novel are real,” he says in a note at the beginning of the book, “but they may have been embellished to make them more interesting to the reader – not that they were not interesting to begin with.”

Indeed, it is the interesting characters that make this story engaging. The reader learns that everyone has a nickname on the Appalachian Trail. Kirk, the semi-retired baby boomer narrator, is known as Piece Maker. He sets off on a hike from his Atlanta home by himself and meets a number of colorful personalities along the way, including the fun-loving Bruiser and Tooth Fairy, a large woman who is not at all what she seems.

Kirk stays a few nights at the Nantahala Outdoor Center in North Carolina and befriends a young woman named Caroline. Caroline, despite her youth, stirs emotions in Kirk but their relationship remains platonic. A central character in *Lost Then Found*, Caroline makes an unexpected appearance later in the story.

Kirk must move along, and that’s when he meets the somewhat mysterious Pops, an old man who is unusually fit for his age. Kirk and Pops end up hiking together and sharing details of each other’s lives. Their talks cause Kirk to reflect on his marriage, his daughter, and the meaning of life. It is Pops who awakens a spiritual side in Kirk that he didn’t realize he had.

The author does a fine job describing Kirk’s journey (both the actual one on the trail and the metaphorical one) with just enough detail to give the reader a sense of what hiking the Appalachian Trail is like. The first-person narrative provides the reader with an intimate view of the hiking experience as well as Kirk’s thoughts on life.

Morgan skillfully paints pictures of the story’s characters so that they have realism and depth. The narrator himself is the most developed character, but Caroline may be the most

complex; in fact, the story is as much about her journey as it is about Kirk's. Pops, as Kirk's spiritual guide, is the most mystical and endearing character in the book.

Lost Then Found is a thought-provoking story that uses the Appalachian Trail as a backdrop to what is, ultimately, a story about spiritual enlightenment. With an unusual twist at the end, *Lost Then Found* is a satisfying and enjoyable book that will likely make the reader take stock and think about his or her own life.

Barry Silverstein