ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Memories by the Mile: A Couple's Exciting Journey Through 50 Years of World Travel
George Wilbur
BookSurge
978-1-4392-5681-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

The trouble with a really good travel memoir, is that it provokes vicarious salivating over exotic foods and scenery, coupled with obsessions about quitting ones job, and cashing in the 401(k) to finance an escape. In *Memories by the Mile*, this dilemma is compounded by the sheer volume of extraordinary adventures George and Viola Wilbur experienced over several decades. From safari in Africa, to the fjords of New Zealand, to dozens of UNESCO World Heritage sites, they seemingly did it all, and also kept falling into unbelievable room upgrades, uncannily perfect timing for festivals, rare wildlife sightings, and other serendipitous experiences.

The epic began in 1946, when Wilbur joined the navy for adventure, and was soon a journalist on Guam. He had memorable stops in China, Japan, and the Philippines, and his stories about these years run the gamut from hilarious to heartbreaking. He writes with deep compassion about the ravages of WWII, and his firsthand accounts of breathtaking destruction and suffering are superb. Blessedly, they're tempered by poignant and delightful incidents only a single young sailor could relate. Wilbur returned to the US, finished college, became a reporter for the Associated Press, married Viola, and thus commenced their momentous travel odyssey with a somewhat tame honeymoon in the Bahamas.

For the next 700 pages, Wilbur both exhausts and regales his audience with, what feels like, everything they ever did that was slightly more interesting than eating eggs and toast for breakfast. There are an almost predictable abundance of mildly harrowing run-ins with the law, roads, viruses, weather, other travelers, shopkeepers, innkeepers, and rhinoceroses. Were they not so well written, reading a ubiquity of stories so similar would be difficult. But to his credit, Wilbur is able to give each a much needed freshness.

The most enjoyable trips in the book, are those taken on a budget and without guides in the 1960's and 1970's. The Wilburs' used *Europe on $5 a Day* to meander the Continent, and their litany of bargains — a recurring theme throughout the book — is priceless in itself. Their mostly bed and breakfast accommodations, road trips in a VW Beetle, and interactions with the

locals, never fail to amuse.

In 1970, they toured the Far East, and while flying from Hong Kong to Bangkok, watched out their windows as American bombers dropped napalm in Vietnam. This is just one of a multitude of epochal vignettes, that bring history to life, and give it a personal twist.

Memories by the Mile could be a few hundred pages shorter, but it really doesn't have to be. Wilbur provides welcome background information to most of the countries, with a special emphasis on his passion: battle sites and military history. He also offers a plethora of travel tips and idiomatic insights. While some of his recommendations and recollections are stale, even the most seasoned traveler is sure to learn something from these clever and intrepid adventurers. Baby boomers and their parents, with a love for travel, history, lengthy tomes, mouthwatering food, and breathtaking scenery, will thoroughly enjoy this book.

Patty Sutherland