

My Journey Through War and Peace: Explorations of a Young Filmmaker, Feminist and Spiritual Seeker

Melissa Burch

Gaia Press (Mar 1, 2016)

Softcover \$12.30 (180pp)

978-0-9893429-7-1

A poignant and informative feminist memoir that spans world landscapes, wars, and spiritual quests.

At twenty-two, Melissa Burch headed to Afghanistan with a camera and a vague internal directive, determined to film a war for CBS and to find herself in the process. She would have to traverse desert sands, Soviet landscapes, and several decades, though, before being fully ready to declare herself awake in the world. *My Journey Through War and Peace* is the dizzying and dazzling account of that journey.

The feminist underpinnings of Burch's work have parallels in sister biographies, particularly Gloria Steinem's: her mother was determined to have both a career and a family, and her father was better at dreaming than accomplishing. Family tensions informed her sense of well-being, and by adulthood she was ready to vacate home. Afghanistan, its war stories then only freshly unveiled by Dan Rather, called.

Her book puts her courtside for explosive battles between Soviet and Afghani forces, as a guest of the *mujahedeen* and in the company of leaders who would go on to shape Middle Eastern history. Uncomfortable treks across dangerous landscapes lead to blurry ethical questions and heady sexual encounters.

But disillusionment followed, particularly when no one back home wanted to buy a nuanced portrait of the Afghanistan conflict. Burch traded the Middle East story for Cold War landscapes, accompanying a friend-cum-lover to Russia to highlight the humanity of those declared America's sworn enemies. When an intricate account of Soviet life proved no more salable than her previous ventures, Burch traded in showing for telling, helping to initiate a woman's speaking collective which gave her and fellow feminists a literal stage from which to declare their truths.

Yet the particular enlightenment at the end of Burch's *Journey* proves to be one that even those traveling with her may fail to anticipate: reconciliation with the mother who once seemed to make her life hell. As Burch grows into a woman who learns to embrace her particularities, she draws closer to understanding her mom, and to appreciating the pressures placed upon women both pre- and post-Friedan. Her conclusions, and spiritual awakening, serve to poignantly bely the notion that we must travel to the ends of the earth to find ourselves. A lovely and enlightening feminist memoir.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Spring 2016)

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