

My Life and Lens: The Story of a Marine Corps Combat Correspondent

Robert L. Bowen

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My Life and Lens is an honest account of a soldier's experiences that is driven by the constant promise of home.

Robert L. Bowen's *My Life and Lens* is a memoir about the pain witnessed in combat, the purpose of one man's fight, and the faith discovered in the heart of a storm.

From earning money raking leaves as a child to his more recent involvement with the Sons of the American Revolution, Bowen shares the experiences that changed him as a marine and as a person. His photography is included throughout. Accounts are thorough and detailed, making immersion in Bowen's story easy, and include shifts between presidents and world tragedies. Bowen captures the spirit of dark and devastating moments, exhibiting human fragility and fallibility.

Combat photographs are included, showing bodies and people in mourning. They are a real and blunt addition, seen through eyes of the artist/witness. The heartbreaking photos are also astonishing, managing to capture the beauty of places he visited—including Okinawa—as well as the humanity and friendship of his comrades.

Bowen doesn't share a lot about his personal or family life in the memoir, instead going from stories of his parents to his life in combat, detailing how he served, wrote, and took photos. Until the last few chapters, in which he writes about his wife's health, his private life is glossed over and barely discussed. As a result, the men and women he served with in combat are better developed in the text than are family members.

Cultural references are included throughout and add a period charm, such as when Bowen wins a dance contest and quotes Gomer Pyle: "Surprise. Surprise!" Moments like these add generational humor to the prose. Other pop-culture references situate the narrative well, too, adding a delightful old-fashioned tone.

In form, the memoir is written like an oral history, instead of bringing events back to the moments in which they happened. As such, there are not many moments of narrative surprise; most comments are interjected from the perspective of the present. Still, this isn't a memoir that worries about twists or turns; instead, it is a picture of the author's journey from a boy with a dream to a man who captured the essence of war and the heart of the people involved in it.

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ELIZABETH KONKEL (May 24, 2017)

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