

Near the Exit: Travels with the Not-So-Grim Reaper

Lori Erickson

Westminster John Knox Press (Aug 13, 2019)

Softcover (180pp)

978-0-664-26567-0

A helpful reminder that no one escapes this life alive, Lori Erickson's *Near the Exit* is a travel text and an act of religious exploration, presenting spiritual meditations from some of the holiest places on Earth.

Erickson developed an early fascination with death and the dying, as well as a healthy appetite for travel. The two converge in this collection of spiritual maps, a travel guide to other cultures and their unique relationships with death. Erickson—an open-minded Episcopal deacon and amateur anthropologist—has explored the tombs of the ancient Egyptians, the sacrificial structures used by the Aztecs, and nursing homes in America, and plumbs those experiences to teach us about the emotions surrounding our own deaths, how to treat those who are dying, and how to grieve and commemorate the dead once they pass.

Erickson also immerses herself in her own grief, her experiences intertwining with everything she learns while traveling. The result is an objective, educational, and often humorous work. Erickson is seen evolving across the book, guided by her willingness to be open and transparent in her faith. She learns even through her skepticism.

Photographs of holy sites around the world preface each chapter and are an entertaining addition. Interviews with others are extraordinary in their insights, and quotes from religious texts and experts make the book's perspective more thorough. Erickson's good-natured and exploratory attitude finds her adapting across cultures and embracing ideas, making her an ideal conduit: her experiences are shown to intertwine with those of her subjects, resulting in unexpected questions and answers.

Showing how coping mechanisms and spiritual practices from around the world can be valuable for learning more about our own lives and eventual deaths, *Near the Exit* is an ideal guidebook to facing the inevitable with religious or spiritual perspective.

KATIE ASHER (July/August 2019)

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