

Places in Time: Reflections on a Journey

Maxine Rose Schur

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The author was twenty-one years old when she set out to see the world. After a spur-of-the-moment wedding at a Berkeley tea shop in 1971, Schur and her new husband embarked on an eighteen-month-long honeymoon through five continents and thirty-two countries. Her reflections on that life-changing journey more than thirty years later are the subject of this remarkable book.

Schur's determination "not merely to observe, but to accept, even integrate" with other cultures distinguishes this essay collection from most travel memoirs. Relatively poor but adventurous, the newlyweds drive, hitchhike, and barter for boat passage to some of the most destitute and isolated communities of the world. Here, in the backwater towns of Switzerland, Guatemala, Afghanistan, and beyond, they discover the true meaning of hospitality. Rarely do the author and her husband arrive in a new village without being invited for tea at the ramshackle home of some young couple, or to live for a month with a family of five in a one-room house made of cardboard and mud.

Living among the locals in this way, the Schurs gain access to people and places wholly untouched by the West. Upon entering the sacred mountain village of Keben in Western Turkey, the author recalls, "They asked questions about the land we came from, the name of our king ... the price of brides there, and the price of good wool sheep." More than just a collection of travel stories, *Places in Time* is a celebration of rural life and the healing power of community. Readers with an interest in sociology will find Schur's commentary particularly enlightening.

This is the author's first published essay collection. She is a two-time recipient of the Lowell Thomas Award, given by the Society of American Travel Writers for excellence in travel journalism. In addition to penning several children's books, she has written for *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *Salon.com*, and *Traveler's Tales*. Ten of the fourteen essays in this collection were published previously.

For all of Schur's efforts to educate, her book is still a thrilling read. Whether she is being held at gunpoint by a renegade sheriff in Mexico or reeling from the bite of a poisonous beetle on a train to Penang, the author relates her adventures with humor and suspense. In fact, her only flaw is a tendency to tell too much. At the conclusion of each chapter, Schur spends several paragraphs analyzing the spiritual lessons she has learned from her travels, an indulgence that contrasts sharply with the subtle prose that characterizes most of the book. It is to Schur's credit, however, that such abstractions are unnecessary: Her amazing story speaks for itself.

AIMEE SABO (June 8, 2006)

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