

Clarion Review ★★★★★

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Seeing the Light through Black Death: Salvation in the African Savanna

Laurence W. Trotter II

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Seeing the Light through Black Death is a fascinating religious memoir that draws lessons from a life-changing cape buffalo attack.

Laurence W. Trotter II's memoir *Seeing the Light through Black Death* draws spiritual lessons from personal events, including a near fatal cape buffalo attack.

Trotter was born in 1954 on a Spokane Air Force base. From an early age, he spent much time outdoors with his father, skiing, hunting, and fishing; he became an accomplished rower through the Boy Scouts. His fascination with the outdoors continued into adulthood; in 2012, it led him to travel to South Africa for an exhilarating hunting trip. There, he was attacked by a buffalo.

The book prefaces the attack with explanations of cape buffalo themselves, covering their physical appearance, behavior, and predators; it discusses trophy hunting, including arguments for and those against the sport, with relevant statistics and references to organizations on both sides of the debate. This informative work results in a broad overview of the circumstances related to Trotter's attack; it is followed by striking details of the attack, including the speed of the charging bull, and the fact that one member of the hunting team scrambled for his gun in the course of it. Trotter's sense of fear and desperation during the incident is clear; the grueling, emotional process of treatment and healing that followed, which included multiple surgeries, is also covered.

The book's sections are thematic; they concentrate on gleaning lessons from Trotter's experiences, and their messages are easy to identify. For instance, while he's home and waiting for surgery, Trotter reflects on the three weeks that brought him to this point; he explains the period as a blessing in disguise, one that helped him to realize that there was a reason for his survival. Quotes from the Christian scriptures are shared, too; they are separated from the main text and support Trotter's takes on topics including love, purpose, compassion, and giving back.

Trotter moves from his own story toward encouraging others to recognize and find comfort in God's presence during the defining periods of their lives. All of its chapters return to this notion, helping to bind it together, from its reflections on a national championship win in rowing that is attributed to prayer, to Trotter's daughter's uplifting recovery from a life-threatening medical condition. However, there are troubling moments in the book, too, including the fact that it references Africa as the dark continent—a term that is based in stereotypes.

Seeing the Light through Black Death is a fascinating religious memoir that draws lessons from a life-changing cape buffalo attack.

EDITH WAIRIMU (January 21, 2021)

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