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Autobiography & Memoir

The Tenth Door: An Adventure Through the Jungles of Enlightenment
Michele Hébert
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Yogi, teacher, and author Michele Hébert invites readers to traverse the demanding spiritual path of Raja Yoga, with its realizations and doubts. Her memoir traces one student's story, from the roots of the human potential movement along the tides of cultural and political unrest. After growing up in a musical Roman Catholic family, in 1960s Cleveland, Hébert struck out for California in 1974—as the first streaker made an appearance.

In San Francisco, she connected with her lifelong guru. Practicing Raja Yoga, "a blueprint for living life…designed for the purposeful evolution of consciousness," with master and former bodybuilder Walt Baptiste, Hébert observed, "He used asanas not as ends in themselves, but rather as means to greater ends." Beyond the yoga postures, for Baptiste's students, every daily action became a focus for practicing mindfulness.

Baptiste and his family ran the first modern health club, surrounded by an ever-present community of like-minded followers. Hébert started working in their restaurant in exchange for yoga lessons. At Baptiste's center, she discovered her spiritual family and the path she has followed ever since.

It's no comfortable or easy journey, this story. Most readers will identify with the author's challenges: self-inflicted guilt, self-doubt, turmoil. "[O]nce we step onto the path of self-mastery…a mighty battle ensues on a mental and emotional level that is not for the faint of heart." Yet her dedication and commitment, along with her deep respect for Baptiste, draw her toward her own "greater ends."

Hébert's mantra, "Peace, harmony, well-being," takes center stage when she is put in charge of the construction crew for Baptiste's planned retreat center in Central America. The heart of the book unfolds with her adventures in paradise—on a secluded strip of coastline in El Salvador on the cusp of the revolution during the late 1970s. Her vivid story runs the gamut from bliss to terror as El Salvador unravels around her and her yoga practices continue.

A curious tunnel vision infiltrates this otherwise engaging tale. At the news of Jonestown's mass suicides, her parents express their concern and she doesn't understand the potential connection.

This memoir encompasses an intimate narrative and reflects the larger social milieu, showing yoga's roots as it became mainstream. Hébert has crafted a genuine page-turner filled with wisdom and insights for yoga fans as well as readers treading the Body-Mind-Spirit path.

Bobbye Middendorf