

The Year the War Came Home

Richard W. Paterson

Lulu

Unknown (pp)

978-1-257-06232-4

Richard W. Paterson's novel is a Vietnam War-era opus about love, war, music, family, and commitment to truth.

The Year the War Came Home primarily narrates Max Carboni's struggle as a young man with whether to heed the call of family and community and join in the war effort, or listen, instead, to his own mind and heart. Is he really a conscientious objector, or merely a coward? Will he abandon his country and his family or will he do his duty? It would have been sufficient if Paterson had written a novel exploring these questions in depth.

But Paterson takes on much more than the war. He addresses the issues of premarital sex and contraception through Max and Francie's physical relationship. He also briefly touches on the controversy over interracial dating, when Max's sister goes out with a black classmate. In addition, the Carboni family has an elderly grandfather who lives alone outside of town, and the family is confronted with whether to place him in a nursing home. Ensuring that all bases are covered, Paterson also includes the topics of marijuana use, police brutality, and corruption. The cornucopia of 1960s' social problems is complete.

Although the novel would have been more compelling had Paterson focused more deeply on fewer issues, he writes well and the story has an easy rhythm. He assiduously follows mystery master Elmore Leonard's rule for dialogue, keeping the author out of the way by writing merely "he said" or "said Max," without further elaboration. Paterson also includes an epilogue, which, although brief, adds little to the story.

The Year the War Came Home effectively offers a glimpse into the hell that war creates for families and those faced with having to participate in combat. Paterson has written a provocative book that is worth reading.

JOHN MICHAEL SENGER (September 14, 2011)

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