

Two Weeks in Vieques: A Lifetime of Memories

Marie Suzanne Dillon

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Marie Suzanne Dillon and her sisters travel the globe together, but always end up talking about their Canadian childhood, even on the beaches of a tiny Caribbean island half a world away. Equal parts travel journal and personal memoir, *Two Weeks in Vieques* follows the current-day adventures of the author and her sisters, Debay and Linda, but always returns to the family memories they share.

Seasoned travelers, the Dillon sisters are game for whatever adventures await them on Vieques, a twenty-one-mile-long island just off of the coast of Puerto Rico, once home to United States Navy bombing ranges and testing grounds. They gamely drive into the wilderness in search of beaches that still bear the Navy's names for them: Red Beach, Green Beach, and Blue Beach. Their willingness to try anything leads to some delightful discoveries, such as Bioluminescent Bay, also known as Mosquito Bay, where they swim amongst glowing microorganisms. Even there the author's thoughts travel back to her childhood, and she compares the experience to making snow angels in Montreal's chilly winters, writing, "This night, we were making angels in the water, and every time we moved our arms it looked as though our wings were sparkling."

Other excursions don't end as happily for the sisters, who seem a little naïve for veteran tourists who should be familiar with island culture from previous trips to Barbados, Saint Vincent, and Saint Lucia. Perhaps they have forgotten that Vieques is also called a "pirate's paradise." The women are given to venturing onto remote trails in search of the most secluded shores, only to leave their belongings sitting unattended while they walk in the waves. The trio is robbed twice during their stay. Always looking on the bright side, Dillon concludes that these mishaps only bring the women closer together.

A perky narrator, Dillon uses exclamation points with great enthusiasm. While the device captures her buoyant personality, the reader may tire of hearing that, "It just doesn't get better than this!" and "Well, today was our lucky day!" Dillon attempts to differentiate the sisters, but her persistently bubbly voice overpowers stories of Linda's teenage obsession with the Dave Clark 5 and Debay's reputation as a seductress. The reader rarely gets a satisfying sense of the sisters as individuals.

Nonetheless, the family feeling is clear. Listening in on the sisters' nightly Scrabble game feels a little like being the extra guest at a family dinner. There's a lot of laughing and many "I remember when" stories, but everyone is on their best behavior and not giving up the juicy gossip. Thus, we hear all about brother John's heroic rescue of stranded sailors in the St. Lawrence Seaway, but very little about Suzanne's struggle with leukemia or Linda's controversial work as an energy healer. As these siblings obviously love to travel together, and Suzanne is such an enthusiastic chronicler, perhaps future trips will prompt more stories and more details about this adventurous family.

SHEILA M. TRASK (December 29, 2012)

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