Clarion Review

Religion

Unintended Consequences: Lessons From a Life Almost Lost

Bill Shaner
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Who better to offer inspiration and a game plan for facing challenges than a man who nearly died, but did not; a man who was told he would never walk again, but did? Bill Shaner is such a man, and in *Unintended Consequences* he provides encouragement for those seeking a spiritual connection.

More than twenty years ago, thirty-one-year-old Shaner was crushed beneath the rubble of a construction project and experienced a near-death experience. In the hospital, doctors told him there was a 1 percent chance he would walk again—and that, they said, was being optimistic.

Shaner cried to the God of his childhood. He made a bargain, promising to go back to church if God would let him walk again. A voice replied, “Everything is going to be alright.” Never questioning the voice as God’s or the veracity of the message, Shaner tenaciously clung to the promise, working hard to rehabilitate himself. Three months after the accident, he walked back into the life he had so abruptly left.

One might think that after such a dramatic healing, the author would have grabbed his crutches and struggled off to the first church service he could find. The reality is, his spiritual awakening did not occur as rapidly as his physical recovery.

Even as he returned to old habits, Shaner was driven to “seek my truth.” He reframed his angry, punishing God into a god he refers to as Universe (God). He believes the Bible “contains much that is spiritually positive” and Shaner quotes passages that support his convictions. His faith is eclectic, suggestive of Norman Vincent Peales’ *The Power of Positive Thinking* and Rhonda Byrn’s *The Secret*. Shaner combines “ancient spiritual traditions with the best that modern science has uncovered”—with some karma and meditation thrown in.

The author moves readers efficiently through his story and into what he now believes. It

is nearly impossible to doubt the power of his experience or the sincerity of his faith, though readers may wonder how Shaner might perceive God today had he not walked again.

There are some strings left dangling. Shaner says God is love, yet he believes Universe (God) impersonally reflects back to us a situation based on the frequency of our thought energies. Negative energy will draw negative experiences via the Law of Attraction. Viewed in this light, Universe (God) seems more like an indifferent force mirroring our energy back to us in the form of sometimes “unintended consequences” than purely a loving God.

Still, it is impossible to read Shaner’s story without being affected by the positive spark of his enthusiasm. His memoir is inspiring even if one does not buy into all of the author’s beliefs.

Ruth Douillette