

What We Give: From Marine to Philanthropist

Terry Salman

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What We Give is an upbeat memoir about surviving the Vietnam War, achieving success, and giving back to those who are less fortunate.

In his memoir *What We Give*, Terry Salman traces the origins of his philanthropy to his family's values and his experiences in Vietnam.

Divided by photographs, this memoir is made up of three distinct parts. The first details Salman's upbringing and marine corps career. He grew up in Montreal; his father taught engineering at McGill, and his mother was a faithful Anglican. After high school, he worked as a bartender and then entered the military at nineteen. In Vietnam, his unit helped to build a naval base and monitored the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Later, Salman earned a business degree, became a father, divorced, and lost his parents. He spent twenty years with an investment banking firm in Montreal before beginning his own business firm. His endeavors outside of work, including travel, charity, and sitting on nonprofit boards, are detailed in the book's last section.

Made up of select anecdotes shared in chronological order, this is a spirited memoir. Motorcycles are a prominent feature in its early stories, which are set in Montreal and Hawaii. Such lightheartedness contrasts with the ardor of Salman's military service, which is covered best via letters from Vietnam, as Salman had difficulty remembering the war and talking about it after the fact. Still elsewhere, a sense of gratitude dominates, with Salman quoting mentors and colleagues, as well as Kierkegaard and David Brooks. However, the sections covering Salman's business acumen are hampered by dry lists of his successes, like brokering deals in Canada's transportation and mining industries. There are sequences of disconnected ideas and events, too.

Often, the book's positive tone gives it a bombastic quality. Although Salman acknowledges his good luck and fortune, there's no coverage of struggles, straining credulity. Salman describes skiing, walking, and surfing to relieve stress, but there's little evidence of the sources of that stress elsewhere. He chooses to become involved in a library, a hospital, and a homeless program because of his interests, values, and history. Giving to environmental causes also seemed like a good idea, the book says, but without a humanizing touch to help others relate. More engaging is Salman's later return to Vietnam and his and his visit to Singapore, where he was named cultural consul to Canada. As he writes about reconciling himself to his past through these trips, his book reaches a heartening, symmetrical conclusion.

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MARI CARLSON (December 31, 2022)

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