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The War Came Home With Him: A Daughter's Memoir



A Daughter's Memoir

Catherine Madison



Synopsis

During his years as a POW in North Korea, Doc Boysen endured hardships he never intended to pass along, especially to his family. Men who refused to eat starved; his children would clean their plates. Men who were weak died; his children would develop character. They would also learn to fear their father, the hero. In a memoir at once harrowing and painfully poignant, Catherine Madison tells the stories of two survivors of one man's war: a father who withstood a prison camp's unspeakable inhumanity and a daughter who withstood the residual cruelty that came home with him. Doc Boysen died fifty years after his ordeal, his POW experience concealed to the end in a hidden cache of documents. In *The War Came Home with Him*, Madison pieces together the horrible tale these papers told of a young captain in the U.S. Army Medical Corps captured in July 1950, beaten and forced to march without shoes or coat on icy trails through mountains to camps where North Korean and Chinese captors held him for more than three years. As the truth about her father's past unfolds, Madison returns to a childhood troubled by his secret torment to consider, in a new light, the telling moments in their complex relationship. Beginning at her father's deathbed, with all her questions still unspoken, and ending with their final conversation, Madison's dual memoir offers a powerful, intimate perspective on the suppressed grief and thwarted love that forever alter a family when a wounded soldier brings his war home.

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Customer Reviews

(I received the Kindle version of this book, free of charge, from Netgalley in return for an honest independent review.) This is the story of Doc, a Korean War survivor; how he survived the War (and being a POW) and family life during his absence and on his return. It is also the story of his daughter Cathy, the author. Useful background information for readers unfamiliar with the Korean War is given as part of the narrative. The book starts in the 1950s and continues up to 2002. Chapters alternate between the father's story in Korea and the daughter's story growing up, mainly in the US, with her returned father's authoritarian parenting style. The changes between timelines are smooth and work well - there are no sudden break offs, or cliff hangers at the end of chapters. There are only 3 main characters, Cathy and her parents. Other family members, friends and POW survivors and non-survivors play a peripheral, albeit essential, role in the book. Themes that stood out for me included the chaos of war (from the soldier's perspective), the importance of friends, how a positive outlook at times of unimaginable suffering really does make a difference, and of course an insight into the Korean War. Also, of course, how to survive growing up with an overly strict, and often frightening, father. What really drew me to this book, was the author's writing style. She uses brevity to give the information pertinent to the action, but does not embellish it. There are moments of total awfulness in some of the Korean scenes, and moments of wit - such as when Cathy has to clear her plate of unwanted asparagus "Chewed until I couldn't chew anymore, then swallowed. ... When it wouldn't go down, its friends came back up.

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