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Unexpected Pilgrims

John F Zurn

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My new book, Unexpected Pilgrims, is a collection of writings that represent a somewhat different direction in both concept and theme for me. Instead of relying on mostly autobiographical experiences, this book is an attempt to create a number of fictional plots and characters that are meant to mirror the happenings in the objective world. To be more specific, my book portrays many mental health issues and social situations from unique points of view. Throughout the text, various individuals who struggle with mental challenges are required to set out and discover ways to cope with adversity in both their external environments and from within themselves. In order to live a purposeful life, each character must face the world or escape from its cruelty and indifference. These travelers are "unexpected pilgrims" because they represent a group of seekers who aren't usually considered distinctive or heroic. Nonetheless, they bravely sojourn through an insensitive world in search of their own secret sanctuaries of acceptance and love. In terms of arrangement and content, Unexpected Pilgrims is divided into three individual segments that are meant to describe and elaborate on this idea of pilgrimage. The first section is comprised of eight short stories that express some of the many ways in which individuals find their way in hostile societies. This search for understanding is often forced upon these seekers, and their success is never guaranteed. Following the short stories, the second section of Unexpected Pilgrims is a one act play called "Behind the Metal Doors." This play is an attempt to describe the mental health professionals and their patients in a way that scrutinizes society's incessant need for conformity, control, and obedience. This obsession with authority is illustrated in the play by the way patients are treated and how they are perceived as human beings. Since these themes have been repeatedly addressed in every kind of writing, I chose to employ strange props and outlandish dialogue in order to awaken in the audience the concepts and themes that have become almost cliché and so seemingly irrelevant. The third and final section of the book is a collection of eighteen original poems. They represent my own personal effort to overcome disappointment and manage depression. These poems also serve as quiet reminders that help me refocus my energy in my own sojourn through the world. Finally, the title of my book, Unexpected Pilgrims, is my way of explaining the idea that we are all pilgrims who are trying to find our way home. Some of the characters in my book go from innocence to experience, and they either succeed or fail. Still others are overpowered by a world that cannot or will not accept them. Nevertheless, the courage, creativity, and perseverance of these mentally challenged pilgrims and their counterparts in the world are a testament to their originality and power. Even in a hostile world that rewards ambition and bows down to the powerful, these unusual souls take to the open road where the uninspired dare not tread.

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