

Book Reviews: The Yellow Leaves

September 9, 2008

***The Yellow Leaves: A Miscellany* by Frederick Buechner
(Westminster John Knox Press)**

In the introduction to this slim volume, acclaimed author and Presbyterian minister Frederick Buechner almost apologizes for it. He notes that at age 80 and after writing more than 30 books, it seems “the well has at last run dry” and “at least for the moment the sweet birds no longer sing.” But he tentatively offers this collection of remembrances and personality sketches, a brief work of fiction and poems about his family as perhaps having “enough life in them” to merit publication.

No apology needed. Perhaps flocks of sweet birds no longer chirp away in prolonged chorus, but the lone, sad bird still offers a whisper-soft, melancholy ballad. Readers seeking sweet, sentimental verses or clear-cut morality plays should look elsewhere. But readers who delight in the music of language and crave a poignant look at the lives of real people—fallible, eccentric, sometimes distasteful but always infused with dignity and grace—have come to the right place.

This book lacks the epic sweep of Buechner’s longer works. Rather, it offers language distilled to its very essence—so achingly beautiful that it cuts deep. *The Yellow Leaves* represents concentrated Buechner. Just add water, and enjoy the life that runs through these pages.

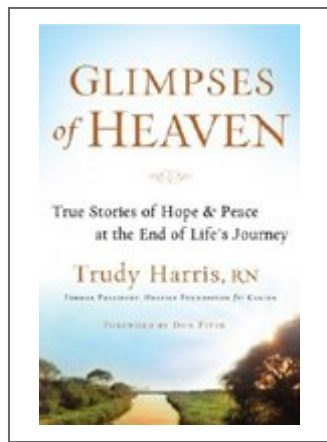
Ken Camp, managing editor

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***Glimpses of Heaven: True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life's Journey* by Trudy Harris (Revell)**

Offering a wonderful book that deals with a timely issue facing many people, Trudy Harris has written about individuals and families as they face impending death.



The true end-of-life stories describe the various experiences individuals had with God, family, friends and medical caregivers. Having served as a hospice nurse more than 20 years, Harris' love for God, her patients and their families can be seen in every story. Through her eyes and heart, one is able to experience God's presence and work in the moving accounts of people such as Zach, a dying 3-year-old; Tim, a young husband and father facing death from malignant melanoma; and her own father, dying from multiple myeloma.

Glimpses of Heaven tells 44 stories that include people from different walks of faith. It is a book that offers encouragement, comfort, insight and hope—especially to those in the midst of great challenges and stress.

A valuable tool for ministers, families and caregivers, this book also can be shared with people facing terminal life issues. From the true stories, one can find God's hope and peace in the midst of physical, emotional and

spiritual pain.

Trudy Harris has written a heart-touching, tear-wiping, soul-stirring book worth reading and keeping.

Randall Scott, pastor

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***By My Own Reckoning* by Cecil Sherman (Smyth & Helwys)**

In his autobiography, Cecil Sherman writes honestly and forthrightly about his life as a Baptist pastor and leader. As a longtime beloved commentary writer for Smyth & Helwys, he writes with characteristic transparency and authenticity. The account of the descent of his wife, Dot, into Alzheimer's disease is particularly poignant, adding to his story a deeply personal agony that touches countless families.



Relating his experience as one of the primary figures in the denominational conflict of the past 30 years, Sherman emphasizes his was and is *one perspective*, giving the reader courage to view this part of our collective history with acceptance, mercy and grace.

Reading this book reminds me how our culture is starved for authentic

heroes. Fed with junk food about celebrity, perhaps we have forgotten a real hero has moral courage, radical honesty, faithfulness to his task and his people, and the rare humility to admit mistakes while seeking solutions and resolutions, restoration and repair.

In a world of few heroes and so desperate for spiritual nurturance, it will accept almost anything as “spiritual,” Cecil Sherman is a genuine hero. His autobiography is a treasured addition to the Baptist story. He, himself, is one of our treasures.

Jeanie Miley, author & conference leader

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