



Serendib

Jim Toner

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I didn't invite him. The idea was all my father's, my seventy-four-year-old father who had never been outside America and who suddenly thought that Sri Lanka, where I was a Peace Corps volunteer, would be a jolly place to visit.

When John Toner, a retired Cleveland judge, decided on a whim in April 1990 to spend a month with his son in war-torn Sri Lanka, he was as much a stranger to his seventh--and last--child as he was to the hardships of life in a Third World country. *Serendib* chronicles the journey that follows as a father and son who had never been alone together live in close quarters, in the poorest of conditions--and replace awkwardness and distance with understanding and love.

Along the way are the stories of John learning to eat with his fingers, bathing in a river alongside cows, and trading his wool trousers for a traditional sarong. We witness his coming face-to-face with a Hindu priest in a loincloth and his first encounter with the everyday violence of a country at war with itself. John watches with awe as students learn without computers, books, or even paper; he bonds with Sri Lankan children and learns, once again, how to give and how to play. Each new experience pushes Toner's father to face his fears--and brings him closer to his youngest son.

Serendib offers a colorful, humorous, and touching account of multiple discoveries--of an old man exploring deep within himself, of a father and son finding each other, and of two cultures coming together on uncommon ground and awakening to the joy and hope of the life they share.

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