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HAVE YOU SEEN THESE CHILDREN?

Veronica Slaughter
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BOOK REVIEW

A debut memoir that recounts the agonizing ordeal of a four-year-long parental abduction.

Slaughter, a retired chiropractor, was 8 years old in 1959 when her father, Bob, kidnapped her and her three siblings—sister Valorie, 9, and two brothers, Vance, 7, and Vincent, 3. (The author notes that she changed the names and characteristics of some people in the text.) Her father shuttled them across six states in a four-year period and enrolled them in seven schools along the way. Bob, an Army veteran, had been stationed in the Philippines, where he'd met and married Slaughter's Filipino mother, Lily, although her union to an American didn't receive the blessing of her traditional parents. As they started a family, lies clouded the marriage as it became apparent that Bob's wealth came from his involvement in a corrupt smuggling operation. Slaughter was just 2 when her father announced the family's relocation to America; his abuse of Lily, the author says, led to her return to her homeland with her very young children. Three years later, Bob hatched his scheme to abduct the children and bring them back to America. Slaughter's sense of loss is palpable as she tells of acting as a guardian for the other children; of meeting strange, if kindhearted, relatives; and of enduring moves from California to Denver to Las Vegas to the South and elsewhere. The author effectively generates a feeling of suspense as the story goes on, although the children are consistently guided to safety thanks to the author's unwavering tenacity and devotion. Slaughter writes with passion, gracefully offering the delicate details of her parents' courtship and the erosion of her own relationship with her father as well as relating the fear and confusion that she and her siblings felt. Her narrative dexterity will hook readers immediately, and an emotional mother-children reunion sets the tone for the healing to come. Slaughter's updates regarding her siblings' later lives are heartbreaking, but she also notes that, in writing her memoir, "what I feared for so long has been transformed into an awakening."

A poignant account of traumatic childhood memories, resilience, and survival.

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