



Wisdom from a Rainforest: The Spiritual Journey of an Anthropologist

By Stuart Schlegel

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Wisdom from a Rainforest: The Spiritual Journey of an Anthropologist By Stuart Schlegel

In the early sixties, Stuart Schlegel went into a remote rainforest on the Philippine island of Mindanao as an anthropologist in search of material. What he found was a group of people whose tolerant, gentle way of life would transform his own values and beliefs profoundly. *Wisdom from a Rainforest* is Schlegel's testament to his experience and to the Teduray people of Figel, from whom he learned such vital, lasting lessons.

Schlegel's lively ethnography of the Teduray portrays how their behavior and traditions revolved around kindness and compassion for humans, animals, and the spirits sharing their worlds. Schlegel describes the Teduray's remarkable legal system and their strong story-telling tradition, their elaborate cosmology, and their ritual celebrations. At the same time, Schlegel recounts his own transformation?how his worldview as a member of an advanced, civilized society was shaken to the core by a so-called primitive people. He begins to realize how culturally determined his own values are and to see with great clarity how much the Teduray can teach him about gender equality, tolerance for difference, generosity, and cooperation.

By turns funny, tender, and gripping, *Wisdom from a Rainforest* honors the Teduray's legacy and helps us see how much we can learn from a way of life so different from our own.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #875200 in Books
- Brand: Brand: University of Georgia Press
- Published on: 2003-09-01
- Released on: 2003-09-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .76" w x 5.50" l, .72 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

From the outset, Schlegel, a professor emeritus of anthropology at UC-Santa Cruz, informs readers that this book "is much more personal than just an ethnographer's report from the field.... I will also take you into some extraordinarily sensitive times in my own life. I want to introduce you to the thinking of these people in all its beauty and elegance." The subjects are the Teduray "forest people" of the Philippines. Schlegel lived among them twice in the 1960s, first as an Episcopal missionary and later as a graduate student of anthropology. He chronicles his second two-year stint, experienced as a participant-observer rather than as an evangelist. All aspects of Teduray society—cooperative farming, family structure, shamanic medicine and environmental care—were informed by one pervasive edict: not to "give anyone a bad gall bladder," meaning to avoid wounding anyone in any way. The result of this overriding principle, writes Schlegel, was a culture without competition, violence or inequality. Schlegel leads readers along his own journey toward the conclusion that contemporary American life, with its glorification of competition, is, in the words of the Teduray, "no way to live." Schlegel's observations of Teduray culture are sharp and insightful, a quality of attention that saves his book from slipping into the sort of vague, antimodern moralism that finds virtue only in the noble savage. His message is made all the more poignant by the fact that the peaceful Teduray with whom he lived were massacred in the early 1970s.

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From Library Journal

Less a conventional autobiography or a memoir than an account of the author's sojourns, this is the tale of Schlegel's experience with the Teduray people of Mindanao Island in the Philippines. Many readers will enjoy Schlegel's description of the Tedurays' gentle and generally non-violent ways, just as they will sympathize with his gradual movement from conventional Christianity toward a broader spirituality influenced by the Tedurays' "partnership of life." Recommended for collections strong in new religions.

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From Kirkus Reviews

An anthropologist paints an admiring picture of a now extinct tribe with whom he dwelled for two years on the Philippine island of Mindanao. Schlegel (Anthropology/Univ. of Calif., Santa Cruz), then a doctoral student, moved his wife and young children to the island of Mindanao in 1967 (having previously served there as an Episcopal priest) and then headed into the bush to observe and record the life of the Teduray. In time, Schlegel came to esteem them for their communal, egalitarian values. The Teduray had no established hierarchy; beyond a sexual division of labor, there was no sexual discrimination; disputes were handled in accordance with a strict legal code and reparations for various infractions (usually elopement from a marriage, which occurred frequently) were painstakingly worked out. The tribe's central precept, a twist on the Golden Rule, was "Don't give anyone a bad gall bladder," said organ seen by the Teduray as the center of one's rational and emotional senses. So much did Schlegel take to his study group, in fact, that his own consciousness started to change, and much of this account is a meditation on the contrasting realities of the tribe and that of the modern world. Written some 30 years after his experience, Schlegel's account, beyond his astute discussions of creation myths, religion and daily living habits, is less an objective study than a personal voyage of discovery. The book ends in great sadness: in 1972, Schlegel, by then a professor, learned that the entire tribe had been killed by rebels during a period of religious and civil strife on Mindanao; a decade later, one of his children who had at times joined him in the field, died from a lingering disease. Part serious anthropology and part reflection from the distance of years, the book is finally a testament to one of

the myriad of vanished peoples of this century. (map) -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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