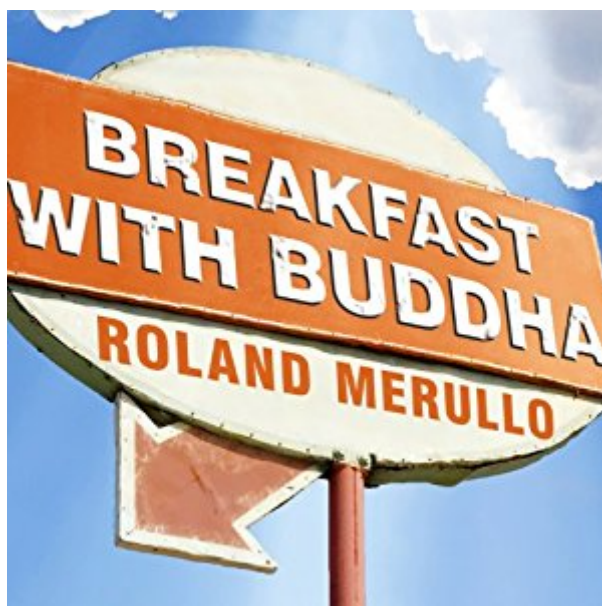


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Breakfast With Buddha: A Novel



Synopsis

When his sister tricks him into taking her guru on a trip to their childhood home, Otto Ringling, a confirmed skeptic, is not amused. Six days on the road with an enigmatic holy man who answers every question with a riddle is not what he'd planned. But in an effort to westernize his passenger---and amuse himself---he decides to show the monk some "American fun" along the way. From a chocolate factory in Hershey to a bowling alley in South Bend, from a Cubs game at Wrigley field to his family farm near Bismarck, Otto is given the remarkable opportunity to see his world---and more important, his life---through someone else's eyes. Gradually, skepticism yields to amazement as he realizes that his companion might just be the real thing. In Roland Merullo's masterful hands, Otto tells his story with all the wonder, bemusement, and wry humor of a man who unwittingly finds what he's missing in the most unexpected place.

Book Information

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Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational

Customer Reviews

Food book editor and ordinary suburbanite dad/husband Otto Ringling drives from New York to North Dakota with improbable passenger, Buddhist guru/yoga master Volya Rinpoche. Is this serious or another Bing & Bob "On the Road" movie to provide guffaws? In the end, it's neither. The serious spiritual transformation of Ringling is shallow, rushed and predictable. By the very end, it feels phony. Diner conversations about the meaning of life are limpid and meatless: "What matters is how you treat people." "Live a good life. Help people. Meditate. Don't Hurt." And seven days later, a miracle: Otto is transformed. The comedic aspect falls short, too. Two oddballs, picture Zippy the

pinhead and Walter Matthau, leave the planet for seven days to travel in the mash potatoes and gravy of the mid-west. There are some lame scenes where the crimson robed monk is embarrassingly out-of-place (swimming in a Speedo at a Minnesota lake, mini-golfing in Wisconsin) and where Otto struggles in his spiritual awakening (tearing muscles in a yoga class). Amusing possibilities, but Merullo's humor is flat. Bill Bryson's "A Walk in the Woods" interplay with his friend Katz come to mind as far funnier. In spots, Merullo is very ordinary and humdrum. An entire paragraph devoted to the motel décor in South Bend that depicts Notre Dame football? The observation that football, not Catholicism, is the religion at Notre Dame? C'mon. Cliché. Detailed descriptions of mid-west German restaurants down to the pictures of lederhosen on the walls? Yawn. Merullo isn't too bad at describing meals. By the time, our boys hit dinner, like ever-famished Otto, we are ready to dive into the New York strip steak and roasted shallots.

BREAKFAST WITH BUDDHA is Roland Merullo's story of a man's journey to self-discovery. The means by which Otto Ringling transforms his viewpoints on life, love, parents, children, siblings and growth is told quite simply. Otto begins a cross-country drive from his home in a New York City suburb to the remote plains of North Dakota, to the farm where he spent his childhood. His novel could read as a travelogue across the mid-section of the United States. However, BREAKFAST WITH BUDDHA is a trip marked by memories revived in the places he now visits. Told in the first person, the book engulfs the reader immediately into the task that Otto must perform. His parents' lives have been snuffed in an automobile crash. Otto plans an August itinerary for travel that accommodates his busy schedule as a New York editor. Summer is the slack season for book promotion, an ideal time to re-bond with his flaky sister, Cecilia. She's a retreat from the '60s, complete with yoga, incense and her spiritual guru, Volya Rinpoche. The crimson-robed Skovordinian monk is a Zen-master in his own right, with the credit of books written and a dedicated following. His popularity reaches into the Midwest where he is scheduled to speak on his favorite subjects. Arriving at Cecilia's sanctuary, Otto meets the affable, intelligent monk and plans to whisk his sister off to North Dakota, where they hope to settle the family estate. Otto's first impression was that Seese was dating the Dali Lama. Trepidation floods him when she states, "Otto, Sweethart...Rinpoche is going on the trip to North Dakota." Her brother pretends not to hear her. Furthermore, she plans to deed her half of the family farm to the monk for a spiritual center. Angry and feeling duped, Otto excuses Rinpoche from the scene.

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