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Planet of the Blind: A Memoir

Von Stephen Kuusisto

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PLANET OF THE BLIND

A MEMOIR

STEPHEN KUUSISTO

"KUUSISTO HAS WRITTEN A BOOK THAT MAKES
THE READER UNDERSTAND THE TERRIFYING EXPERIENCE OF BLINDNESS
AND THAT STANDS ON ITS OWN AS THE LYRICAL MEMOIR OF A POET."

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Von Stephen Kuusisto : Planet of the Blind: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Planet of the Blind: A Memoir:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. denial and disabilityVon C. PIPERWhen people ask me if it isn't "painful" to be deaf, I often surprise them by saying: "not nearly as painful as being hard-of-hearing." Back in those days, you see, I was still trying hard to fit into a hearing world. I was still coming to terms with what hearing loss meant to me, and dreading what it might mean in the future.

All in all, it is far easier for me now, totally deaf that I am, than it ever was to be hard-of-hearing when my constant companions were denial and pain. I was reminded of all of this recently when I read Stephen Kuusisto's book "Planet of the Blind; a Memoir" for here is someone who knows well what it means to live hand-in-hand with those same companions. Mr Kuusisto began his odyssey through the land of denial as a result of a premature birth, which resulted in almost total blindness. The seeds of pain took root soon afterwards, as his parents struggled to find their way through unanticipated and, to them, rather horrifying territory. In the end, like many parents faced with such a situation, they chose the "you can do anything you want to" path. Now, this path, properly followed, is not bad in and of itself. Certainly we have all heard of people who have learned to manage despite harrowing disabilities. Just the other day, for example, I saw on TV a feature on a woman who is doing just fine without arms, compensating through the use of her legs and feet. "My parents" she told the audience, "always told me there was nothing I could not do." At the end of a film clip, in which she demonstrated her abilities, the audience stood up and gave her a standing ovation, and everyone, I am sure, went home with happy tears in their eyes. The danger in this mind set is that, human that we are, we tend to look for happy endings and forget how important it is in such situations that the word "compensate" be factored into the equation. In other words, there has to be some way that the disabled person can get around the problems presented by the disability with some degree of ease and success. The lady on TV, for example, was able to use her legs and feet for almost all daily tasks. Mr Kuusisto's parents took the same tactic, hoping I am sure to instill both ability and self confidence into their son. Alas, there were no figurative or metaphorical legs and feet to support the author as he was thrown willy-nilly into normal life situations with no means of gaining mastery over his daily problems. He was not, for example, taught braille, or given mobility training. Nor, when it came time for school, despite the fact that he could see letters only one at a time by holding a book inches from his one minimally functioning eye, were any special concessions made to his blindness. Instead, as in all other endeavors, he was left to manage as best he could. As Mr Kuusisto himself puts it, in summarizing his first thirty odd years: ... raised to know I was blind but taught to disavow it, I grew bent over like the dry tinder grass. I couldn't stand up proudly, nor could I retreat. I reflected my mother's complex bravery and denial and marched everywhere at dizzying speeds without a cane. Still, I remained ashamed of my blind self, that blackened dolmen. The very words blind and blindness were scarcely spoken around me... (and) my mother could avoid the word, relegating it to the province of cancer. Fortunately Mr Kuusisto was extraordinarily bright. He managed, somehow he managed; learning to ride, for example, a two wheeler, albeit in stark terror as he peddled. Graduating from college, he spent a year in Finland in totally unfamiliar surroundings, a situation akin to suddenly, because of the language barrier, becoming both blind and deaf. But still, though drowning in fear and anxiety at virtually every step, he marched on pretending to live as an equal citizen in a sighted world. Eventually, of course, he could manage no longer. Both his will and his strength gave out. He began to sink, and ended up virtually destitute, holed up in a small room at the mercy of the beasts that emerge when you deny not only who you are, but what you are. Then, and only then, did he allow reality entrance to his life and concede, after nearing being killed by a truck: "I need help walking. I've needed help all my life. It's that simple." It ought to be- that simple that is. For most of us, or at least for me, it was not. What is it in us that allows us to welcome such pain in our lives in lieu of truth? Is being like everyone else really so important that we are willing to deny ourselves, almost literally destroy ourselves, as we pay worship to it? Apparently so, for how well, and with what pain I remember pretending to have heard what was whispered to me in the dark of night in childhood. How well I remember those birthday parties which featured the old game of "telephone." Always outrageously wrong, I would sit there nodding my head, or shaking it with wonder at how distorted the message had become as it passed from person to person. Never would I have dared to admit that I could not understand, anymore than I could admit that I had not the foggiest idea of plot or dialogue when at the movies. Pretending. Always pretending; covered with sweat, consumed by anxiety, fearful of the future. Fearful, most of all of discovery. I was lucky. I did not hit bottom nearly as deeply or as hard as Mr Kuusisto did. But I well remember the pain and fear with which I greeted each new day. I remember shaking in terror, hiding in bathrooms to avoid meetings at work, and going miles out of my way to deliver messages in person rather than attempt use of the telephone. Life is easier now of course, We have the American Disabilities Act., TTYs and Closed Captioning, to name just a few for the deaf, but still, all the technological advances in the world are useless if we refuse to acknowledge and name our disability, and, most importantly, reach out for help when we need it. Denial, as the old saying goes, is way more than the name of a river, and no one has shown this more clearly than Mr Kuusisto in this honest, beautiful and almost poetic, book; a cautionary tale, which should be required reading not only for disabled people, but for parents who suddenly find themselves in charge of guiding their children through the frightening and unfamiliar landscape of disability.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. The Power of Imagination triumphs the Power of the Senses Von C. Wu Kuusisto powerful prose reminds one of the awesome power of the imagination in this touching memoir of struggle and finally acceptance. Not a typical movie of the week redemption story, but a hard fought tale of the struggles of the author and his view of himself. We too are then reminded of our own struggle with our own view of ourselves. We travel with the author as he denies his "limitations" and goes through the world as if he can see. Comical in concept, touching in delivery. Its strength reminds us that we should be grateful, and accept the limitations of others and ourselves with grace. Great description

of the perils such as curbs, dogs and low hanging branches, what we ignore in our daily lives, reminds us of how much we miss around us. The book also suggests great issues of the demand for perfection in our society, and how we deal with it, or our lack of it. A thoroughly depressing section on his experiences in Finland, serves to those with all our senses how lucky we truly are. This book does what good writing is suppose to do, expand our repertoire of experiences. 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. an excellent memoir Von Ein Kunde I am not "physically challenged" by any definition, and I can strongly recommend this book to any reader who enjoys memoir and autobiography. The author has much to say about the importance of being true to oneself, and learning to identify and utilize available resources. His writing style utilizes a lot of visual imagery, which contrasts strongly with the subject matter, and provides an intriguing pull to the reader. I was fully engrossed for several days, and have begun to read it a second time! I was also moved by the references he makes to a personal faith. Many of these references are somewhat oblique, yet combine with the rest of his story to present a whole, human person who had triumphed over much, and as a wonderful gift to the rest of us, has the ability to share his story with honesty and beauty.

Kurzbeschreibung "The world is a surreal pageant," writes Stephen Kuusisto. "Ahead of me the shapes and colors suggest the sails of Tristan's ship or an elephant's ear floating in air, though in reality it is a middle-aged man in a London Fog rain coat which billows behind him in the April wind." So begins Kuusisto's memoir, *Planet of the Blind*, a journey through the kaleidoscope geography of the partially-sighted, where everyday encounters become revelations, struggles, or simple triumphs. Not fully blind, not fully sighted, the author lives in what he describes as "the customs-house of the blind", a midway point between vision and blindness that makes possible his unique perception of the world. In this singular memoir, Kuusisto charts the years of a childhood spent behind bottle-lens glasses trying to pass as a normal boy, the depression that brought him from obesity to anorexia, the struggle through high school, college, first love, and sex. Ridiculed by his classmates, his parents in denial, here is the story of a man caught in a perilous world with no one to trust--until a devastating accident forces him to accept his own disability and place his confidence in the one relationship that can reconnect him to the world--the relationship with his guide dog, a golden Labrador retriever named Corky. With Corky at his side, Kuusisto is again awakened to his abilities, his voice as a writer and his own particular place in the world around him. Written with all the emotional precision of poetry, Kuusisto's evocative memoir explores the painful irony of a visually sensitive individual--in love with reading, painting, and the everyday images of the natural world--faced with his gradual descent into blindness. Folded into his own experience is the rich folklore the phenomenon of blindness has inspired throughout history and legend. "In the country of the blind," the old adage asserts, "the one-eyed man is king." But in Stephen Kuusisto's superb new memoir, *The Planet of the Blind*, the world of a one-eyed man is a kingdom of confusion and quixotic struggle. Born with only residual vision, one eye capable of 20/200 vision and the other unseeing, Kuusisto was led by the insistence of his mother and the ignorance of the society around him to an elaborate and harrowing attempt to appear sighted. At times the effort was life-threatening, as with the bicycle he rode from the ages of 10 to 30 ("Were my years of cycling an actuarial gift?" he wonders), and at other times profoundly humiliating, as when his stumblings and collisions are assumed to be signs of habitual drunkenness. Indeed, the almost inconceivable effort of maintaining his sighted masquerade leads to all sorts of self-destructive behavior, from obesity to anorexia, from booze and cigarettes to drugs and perilous clambers up fire escapes. Most biography is a recounting of struggle that leads to success and achievement, but Kuusisto's story is of a lifelong struggle that leads to acceptance. For this gifted poet, the barely glimpsed visual world is an irresistible temptation, despite pain, embarrassment, and failure. When he finally submits to the white cane and a guide dog, suddenly he can envision a "Planet of the Blind," a place where those without sight live in peace with their own lives, where "everyone is free to touch faces, paintings, gardens," a place where beauty is behind the eye of the beholder. --John Longenbaugh *Pressestimmen* "[Kuusisto] is a powerful writer with a musical ear for language and a gift for emotional candor. He has written a book that makes the reader understand the terrifying experience of blindness and that stands on its own as the lyrical memoir of a poet." --Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* "The sheer beauty of Kuusisto's writing creates a miraculous planet; a swirl of sensation and nuanced perception, ecstasy, terror and love. Here a soul on a bicycle is propelled by pure desire. And here we, in turn, are propelled toward a new vision." --Andrea Barrett, author of *Ship Fever*