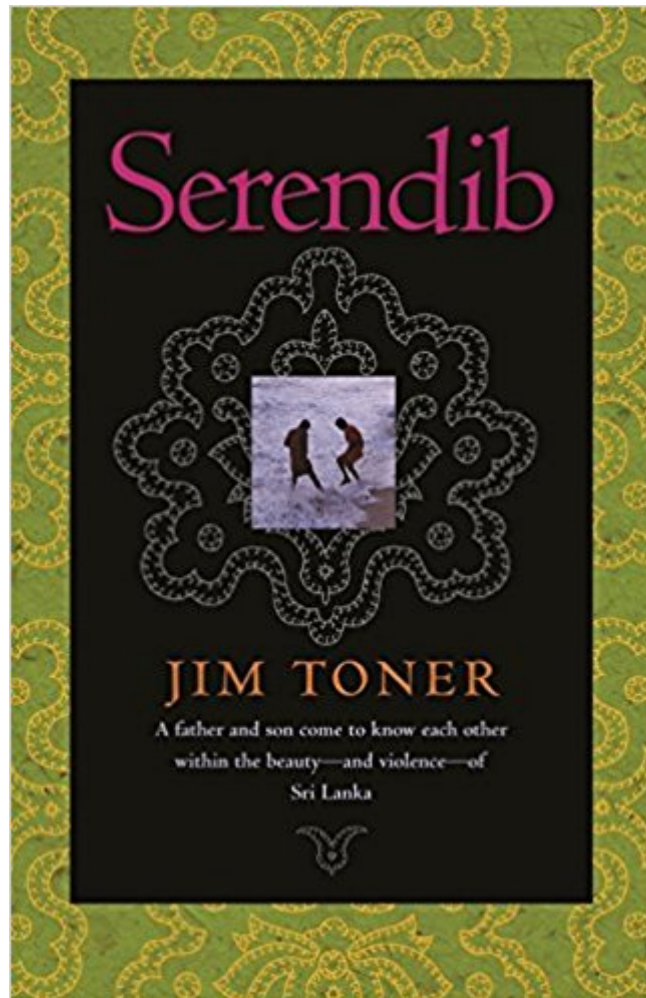




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Serendib



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Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

Peace Corps volunteer Jim Toner relates the story of his 74-year-old Irish-Catholic father's

unexpected visit to Sri Lanka in Serendib. Conservative, retired judge John Toner had never been outside America; his experiences during his month on the beautiful but impoverished, civil war-torn island are wryly observed through his son's eyes as the older man gradually learns to adapt to alien surroundings and customs while forming a bond with a son he never really knew. This book is effective not only as a touching memoir but as an illumination of a complex and fascinating culture. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Serendib is winning and moving. More than the epic paternal story, Jim Toner's book becomes a cross-cultural tale in which a son comes to understand his own heritage against the backdrop of a strange land. It vividly portrays the mythic journey we all must take and the cultural journey we all should take. -- a very fine book. (Steven Harvey author of Bound for Shady Grove) Serendib is a compelling and urgent memoir. The writing is stunning, the characters fascinating and memorable, the locale of war-torn Sri Lanka, exotic. This is a story full of love, innocence, and spirituality. Very little contemporary literature possesses such sweet power. (Sue William Silverman author of Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You) Serendib is filled with scenes that both lay bare and redefine the relationship between father and son. . . . Because of this, and because of Toner's insightful prose, Serendib is an impressive first book. (Fourth Genre) Peace Corps volunteer Jim Toner relates the story of his 74-year-old Irish-Catholic father's unexpected visit to Sri Lanka in Serendib. Conservative, retired judge John Toner had never been outside America; his experiences during his month on the beautiful but impoverished, civil war-torn island are wryly observed through his son's eyes. . . . This book is effective not only as a touching memoir but as an illumination of a complex and fascinating culture. (Publishers Weekly)

Let me add my appreciation for a well-written father-son story which manages also to describe vividly aspects of Sri Lanka during its civil war and the Peace Corps experience there.

I've read a lot of Peace Corps literature and this is among the best. It is an unvarnished view of life in rural Sri Lanka but also a tribute to the rewards for those who make friends and become part of the culture. He captures the pleasures of rural Sri Lanka -- peace, quiet, tranquillity -- but doesn't shy away from the nasty ethnic and class antagonisms and the brutality of the wartime military. He only describes one other Peace Corps volunteer, but she is an original -- the foul-mouthed, 65-year old volunteer and con woman from Arkansas, Miss Jewel E. Jewel.

My son's high school was asked to read this over the summer so I thought it would be good to read as well so I could talk to my son about it and what he thought. I was truly delighted by the imagery and eloquence of this book. It was so well written, kept you reading but wasn't a hard read. I was able to read over a couple of days with of course life getting in the way. This was a really great book and I highly recommend it to everyone!!!

This book was assigned at the end of the school year. My son's high school recommends summer reading material so that children keep up on their language and reading skills. He loved the book!

Serendib is a wonderful and fascinating book. It was amazing to read about the transformation of the author's father, and their relationship.

As a Sri Lankan, I am thoroughly upset at the fallacies present in the book. Mr. Toner, has unfairly characterized Sri Lanka as a nation that has no infrastructure, no medicine, extremely disorganized with a dirt poor society. Living in a country for 2 years as a peace corps volunteer gives no insight to the complex social issues or the intricate details of the civil war in northern Sri Lanka, let alone writing a book. Sri Lanka is a developing nation that has a 90% literacy rate, excellent educational facilities and a state sponsored health care system which is excellent. The regular problems plaguing developing nations is present in Sri Lanka but nowhere to the extent the author has made it out to be. The capital Colombo is a modern city comparable to other modern cities in the world. The author makes no reference to that, but goes on talking about how treacherous living in Sri Lanka is. He also goes on to talk about how an Air Lanka aircraft on which his father was a passenger had to make an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia due to a bomb threat, and after the emergency evacuation his father runs off into the Sahara!!! The Sahara desert as we all know is in North Africa and not in the Arabian Peninsula. Mr. Toner is a typical first time traveller who goes on to a distant land to "teach" the natives about the great "American culture" as he puts it and decides to write a book about it. Mr. Toner's father who at 70 something years is travelling out of the USA for the first time in his life talks about how hot and humid Sri Lanka is. He obviously has not visited Texas, Arizona, New Mexico or Florida in his lifetime. This book depicts Sri Lanka as a war-torn nation akin to Rwanda or DR of Congo, when in actuality Sri Lanka is a modern nation with a civil war confined to the north and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

I enjoyed this book thoroughly. It covered so many different feelings in life. I was especially drawn to the moments of discovery with his father. To be in your 40's and to be experiencing your very first journey with your own father is at first a shame that it didn't come sooner and a blessing that it finally did. Learning to know and appreciate your parents as adults is a remarkable thing. Hearing them tell stories that you never heard before, enjoying bits of everyday life with them, watching their eyes sparkle when a chance to play arises--those are all gifts. Thank you, Jim Toner, for introducing me to Sri-Lanka (teka-teka) and for allowing me a moment to know the child in you. I'm blessed to have been able to read your book.

A book that can make you laugh out loud, then cause tears to stream down your face on the very next page is a great rarity. Serendib is just such a book. Every single sentence of this extremely well-crafted novel evokes vivid imagery which delights or saddens the heart depending upon the situation. Jim Toner's charming witticisms made me laugh. The joy he and others found amidst the everyday tragedies in Sri Lanka made me cry. The relationship that developed between Mr. Toner and his aging father in this utter chaos made me do both. It was serendipitous indeed that I came across this wonderful book. I haven't felt such power in the written word in a long, long time.

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