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Tortuga: A Novel



Synopsis

Rudolfo Anaya's personal journey to Tortuga began one desert-hot day when, as an adolescent, he and some friends were swimming in irrigation ditches. He dove in, sustaining an injury that put him in the hospital for an arduous period of time. Tortuga is set in a hospital for crippled children and is based on Anaya's swimming accident. He explores the significance of pain and suffering in a young boy's life and the importance of spiritual recovery as well as medical. Tortuga, or Turtle, is the name of the oddly shaped mountain near the hospital, but "Tortuga" also points toward the rigid cast that encases the young hero's body. In celebration of the twenty-five years since the first edition of Tortuga was published, Rudolfo Anaya has provided an Afterword to share his memories of those days in the hospital and how they impacted the remainder of his life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I loved this novel. I had to rate it slightly lower because the only other person I ever discussed it with found it emotionally very difficult to read. At an age much younger than the characters in this novel I spent some time in a crippled children's home. When I first read Tortuga, I was stunned at finding a story that accurately conveyed the feel of living inside an institution for the physically handicapped. W. Somerset Maugham was the only other author I had ever seen touch on the rougher side of being physically handicapped. I began to think Mr. Anaya must have spent some time in such a place, or done some extraordinary research. The latter seemed unlikely, because I have never heard of anyone talking much about such an experience. This is a novel you must read if you want to get to know anything about the subject of institutionalizing children.

Tortuga (The Turtle) is a 16 year old boy who has broken his back. He is paralyzed, and taken far south to a crippled childrens hospital. I really can't tell you about this book. The hopelessness and the joy in the hospital, and the patients who never get well, the horror, during the time of polio, the children in the wards, grips you in ways that you have never comprehended before. The book is full of symbolism, despair, and joy. There is no way to give you a short discription of this book. I will tell you I desperatly wanted the book to end, to find out what happend, and my soul never wanted it to end, because I don't think I will ever find another book like this. Depending on who you are, you will love and cherish this book, or cuss me. When I finished this book, I held it close, and cried. Then I wrote in it what it meant to me and gave it to the person who means the most to me. It was my most cherished possesion.

Fascinating story and part allegory about the journey of healing. A young man is injured in some type of accident and is sent to a sanitarium for surgery and recovery. Part poetry, dreams, reverie, and novel, this book weaves the story through the eyes of this young man, nicknamed "Tortuga," the name of the "Turtle Mountain" that he can see from his window. The cast of characters is both vivid and heartbreaking, with the voice of wisdom coming through a severely affected polio patient. Bittersweet, wise, and insightful, this book challenges the reader to consider what health and healing means, on a physical, emotional, and spiritual path.

I loved BLESS ME, ULTIMA, so I looked forward to reading this book by the same author. Though well written, it did not have quite the impact that BLESS ME, ULTIMA had on me, but it is a good book and worth reading. The characters are complex and believable, the location in the desert one of the characters in its presence. I appreciated how the author handled the children's characters, no patronizing or stereotyping, the author treated his characters with respect. Loved the mysteries of the place and the shadowy secrets. Good plot, unpredictable, a satisfying, solid read. Would have given this book 4 1/2 stars if I could.

Rudolfo Anaya has written a wonderful book with all the pain and tenderness exposed in the characters who are in a hospital for crippled children off in the desert of New Mexico. Tortuga is a mountain outside the window that has a humped back appearance (like a turtle in Spanish) and which becomes the nickname of the principal character who is admitted to the hospital. The book is a novel but it follows the actual experience of Rudolfo Anaya, who was injured in a diving accident

and was placed in such a children's hospital. His insights are unique, tender and powerful. As a person who remembers the ward in a children's hospital, he weaves the details of the story with wonderful images in the minds of the children. This is classified as a book for children or young adults. However, it is a gripping tale for the older reader also, particularly those who can remember those wards of polio victims prior to the discovery of the Salk and Sabin vaccines. This book is not a "downer" because it fills the reader with the love and hope that are in those children.

I read this book a few years ago, and though I didn't remember all the details of the story, the spirit of this book has remained with me. Reading this book for the second time proved to be just as inspirational as the first. The physical and therefore emotional obstacles these "children" face make me count my blessings. Although each character suffers from some form of physical deformity, you don't cringe at the thought of them, but wish you could be blessed with their strength. Rudolfo Anaya, through his gift for writing poetic literature, weaves a story intertwined with the strength of the human spirit. It isn't a story for the reader's that need all the answers, or that need everything spelled out for them. It is a mixture of dreams, hopes, fears and eventually triumph. It is a story that will make an impression on you though you may never remember the details.

Tortuga follows in the footsteps of *Bless Me Ultima*, one of the best novels covering the new Mexican experience. Mr. Anaya is in a league of his own when it comes to mixing folklore, myth, youth, the desert, our past, our future, all the while weaving his tale into one beautiful adventure we can readily identify with...gracias, hermano.

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