

★ **All of Us Together in the End****Matthew Vollmer**

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In his pensive memoir, Matthew Vollmer investigates the blinking lights that appeared in the woods soon after his mother's death.

In 2019, Vollmer's mother died of complications of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Months later, his father reported that lights had been flashing in the woods near the family cemetery. Vollmer took a graduate student with him and went to witness the phenomenon for himself. Although he had left the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in college, his religious upbringing influenced his investigation, which overlapped with COVID-19: "I couldn't help but imagine existence was bigger—and more mysterious—than what I'd been taught to believe."

Vollmer writes that the supernatural, which is central to the Adventist worldview, coincided with dogma that he'd outgrown, like patriarchy and end-times theology. Thus, though discussing his loss of faith, his book is also a statement of openness to the inexplicable. Could there be an empirical justification for the lights? The International Earthlight Alliance suggested they could be related to magnetic fields. Acquaintances claimed they were proof that his mother's spirit was still earthbound. Vollmer pondered ghosts and satanic activity and consulted the author of *North Carolina Ghost Lights and Legends*, an Episcopal priest, and a shamanic psychotherapist in his search for wisdom.

Within the 2019–20 story line are flashbacks to Vollmer's childhood and boarding school years, as well as tender portraits of his parents, with his mother's industriousness revealed through lists of her activities. The inclusion of emails and other communications makes this a dialogic, ever-questing text. COVID-19 and Vollmer's father's remarriage bring the timeline close to the present, and grief, mysticism, and acceptance of the unexplained are its resonant themes.

All of Us Together in the End is an unforgettable record of "a purposeful journey" that became "a collision with the ineffable."

REBECCA FOSTER (March / April 2023)

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