



Candlelight

Ravi S. Kahn

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The light of faith shines through this memoir from a survivor of the Bangladeshi civil war.

Candlelight is the story of how Ravi S. Kahn, a survivor of the Bangladeshi civil war, overcame his depression to find new meaning and purpose in life. The book stands as a testament of hope for humanity's future.

When turmoil, genocide, and civil war ravaged the newly formed nation of Bangladesh, politically outspoken research scientist Kahn found himself on an assassination list. Together with his wife and two small children, he escaped to America where, as a Muslim, he confronted ethnic and religious prejudice as he worked wholeheartedly to support his family and secure their future.

But as his children adopted Western ways and forsook their ancient traditions and heritage, Kahn fell into a severe depression complicated by health concerns. Now an octogenarian, Kahn writes in a personable, engaging, and conversational tone as he recounts the joyful and painful events of his life.

The clash between the old world, with its centuries-old traditions, and the world he bequeathed to his son—life in America, a land of rapid-fire change, loose connections to place and family, and the freedom to choose to practice any, or no, religion—is revealed in intimate language. “My son had broken the only rule in the relay race of life,” he writes. “For centuries, the male children have carried the baton, or the values and beliefs of the family. It is their job to pass on the family tradition and pride to the next generation.”

Kahn deals honestly and openly with the issues of cultural identity, family expectations, aging, personal responsibility, and religion. His journey to understanding and forgiveness required the help of a psychiatrist. This difficult work, though, led to greater realizations and reconciliations, particularly related to his son: “I shouldn’t blame him for doing what I taught him to do—to run as fast as he could to save his family.”

Occasional errors in word usage, syntax, spacing on the page, and internal references are a distraction. The cover art and design are attractive and appropriate, and the back cover copy gives a good summary of the book’s contents and purpose.

Though Kahn chooses to continue with the “light” of faith and tradition that his parents gave to him, he also chooses forgiveness, growth, and creativity, and he writes with great hopefulness about the future that seems possible for the rising generation. This timely and relevant memoir is an intimate portrayal of the loneliness and loss involved in aging, and of today’s clashes between cultures and generations.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January 28, 2016)

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