



Turn Left At The Trojan Horse: A Would-Be Hero's American Odyssey

Brad Herzog

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"*Turn Left at the Trojan Horse* had me howling with laughter and nodding at the razor-sharp observation." -- Tahir Shah, author of *The Caliph's House*

"*Go away. Figure it out,*" she was saying. "*Don't come back until you do.*" She looked at the calendar. "*You have thirty-one days.*"

With these words, like Helen of Troy launching a thousand ships across the Aegean, Brad Herzog's wife launched a Winnebago Aspect onto the open road.

A modern-day Odysseus in Kerouac clothing, Brad Herzog plunges into a solo cross-country search for insight. With middle age bearing down on him, he takes stock: How has he measured up to his own youthful aspirations? In contemporary America, what is a life well lived? What is a heroic life?

From the foothills of Washington's Mount Olympus, through the forgotten corners of America, and finally to his college reunion in Ithaca, New York, Brad shares his personal odyssey. Stopping in classically named towns, he meets everyday heroes, including a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Troy, Oregon; a modern-day hobo in Iliad, Montana; and a bomb-squad soldier in Sparta, Wisconsin. These encounters and Brad's effortlessly infused musings make for an exciting, one-of-a-kind ride.

"A truly epic journey."

--A.J. Jacobs, author of *The Year of Living Biblically*

"As we sit in Herzog's passenger seat, we cannot help but stare out the window and even see our own reflection in the glass." --Liz Robbins, author of *A Race Like No Other*

Brad Herzog lives on California's Monterey Peninsula with his wife and their two sons. He has been described as a "modern-day Steinbeck" and a "Picasso of the Winnebago," and Lonely Planet has ranked his travel memoirs among eight classics of the genre, along with books like *Travels with Charley* and *On the Road*. As an award-winning freelance writer, he has chronicled some of the nation's most unusual and intriguing subcultures, from nudists to North Pole explorers and from Pez collectors to pro mini golfers.

Turn Left At The Trojan Horse: A Would-Be Hero's American Odyssey Details

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From Reader Review Turn Left At The Trojan Horse: A Would-Be Hero's American Odyssey for online ebook

Valerie says

The conceit of visiting places in the U.S.A that draw their names from Homer is a good one, and I could see myself planning a trip around that, possibly...

L Greyfort says

I'm a sucker for a great title; this has led me in some interesting reading directions, but has also lengthened my list of "Books That Are Not Quite As Good As You Hoped They Would Be" regularly. This one one goes straight onto the List. Near the top.

I enjoyed this one more for its travelogue than for its attempts at philosophical enquiry. Herzog is much more believable and sincere when he is relating his encounters with the inhabitants of the many Odyssey-related-named places he visits, than when he tries to synthesize philosophic conclusions from their discourse. Something about the tone of the writing made the philosophizing unconvincing: it clear to me that this "would-be hero" would never be a hero. A more cynical reader might even dismiss it all as a sales gimmick....

Clearly Mrs. Herzog sent him on this trip to get him out of her hair for a month. Realizing that, his attempts to relate what he is observing to himself feels self-aggrandizing. When he refrains from that, the book is much more palatable.

Jerry-Book says

interesting journey through middle america. Reminds me of a kinder Paul Theroux.

Stewart says

"The Odyssey" by Homer is one of my favorite books, and my library is full of books I've read about that ancient Greek classic and travelogues in general. "Turn Left" is both a book about "The Odyssey" and a personal odyssey across the U.S. from Seattle to a college reunion in Ithaca, N.Y. On the way, Brad Herzog stops at towns and cities that have names that come from ancient Greece, such as Athena and Troy, Ore., Calypso, Mont., Mentor, Minn., Siren and Sparta, Wis., Plato, Ind., Pandora, Ohio, Apollo and Cassandra, Pa., and finally Ithaca. Herzog finds many interesting stories along the way. Especially intriguing is the hamlet of Troy in eastern Oregon, about as remote a town as you will find in this country outside of Alaska. He talks to a few the town's handful of residents and interviews Stephanie Haggard, a Texas native who teaches in a one-classroom school (that nonetheless has 11 computers) while her husband remains in Texas as a high school coach.

My only complaints about the book would be that the journey encompasses only a small part of this country and that there were several sites visited that had nothing to do with ancient Greece. The trip in his Winnebago Aspect covered the northern tier of American states. There is nothing about California, the Southwest, South, New England, or most of the Middle Atlantic states. I realize it would have been exorbitant to try to hit every state, much less visit every town with a name from Greek antiquity, but I would have appreciated a little wider reach and enjoyed reading about perhaps Athens in Georgia or Texas -- or Sparta in Tennessee or Mississippi. There are parts of the book, such as visiting Herzog's childhood summer camp or seeing the world's tallest man-made land-based structure (near Jamestown, N.D.) that had nothing to do with the theme of the book.

Those caveats aside, this is an worthwhile book about the United States in the early 21st century and, along the way, a good education about Greek mythology and Homeric epics.

Michelle Bacon says

Brad Herzog tells of a trip he takes across country to attend a college class reunion. He visits towns with Greek Gods names and compares his journey to The Odyssey. Complete with photos, this is a fun little travel memoir.

Natalie says

I would read anything Brad Herzog writes, but this was a special read I savored a little bit at a time from the summer of one year into the winter of the next.

I love Brad Herzog's self-deprecating style and his ability to wander the world meeting people and starting the conversations that writers must if they are to write the story of where they've been and who they've met, instead of the story of why things aren't working out the way they imagined!

If Eat, Pray, Love bugged you, if you've ever glanced at a sign that said *Nowheresville Pop. 320* and wondered who lived there, this book is for you.

If you ever wondered how like Elizabeth Gilbert and Brad Herzog you were ever going to go anywhere and experience that "Ah-Ha" moment, look no further than Constance Starr, an American mother of eight who went to Japan to study with Shinichi Suzuki. She is rumored to have spent months with him learning how to use his method to teach young musicians how to play *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

Can you imagine that conversation?

'Dear?'

"Yes, Dear".

'I'd like to go to Japan for a few months to play *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* with Shinichi Suzuki, would that be okay?'

Sound of violin making V E R Y crazy noises

"What"?

'You heard me, I'd like to go to Japan for a few months to play *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*'

"Hmm. I guess you've got your heart set on this?"

'Yes, it is something I MUST do!'

"Maybe we should all go?"

Lois says

Frankly, after encountering Paul Theroux's well-written travelogues of life on the road, I never again expected to find another travel writer who appealed to me more—that was until I started reading Brad Herzog's *Turn Left at the Trojan Horse: A Would-be Hero's American Odyssey*. Herzog's third travelogue, which follows on *States of Mind* and *Small World*, takes one on a well-illustrated road journey across America all the way from Seattle, Washington to Ithaca, New York. But this is no mere travel guide, as the author's concerns range widely from death and immortality, to individual and corporate leadership, and friendship and self-awareness, among countless other topics.

Sometimes irreverent, always witty, and even occasionally punning, Herzog is not shy of telling the odd joke. Master of a self-deprecatory style, he succeeds in revealing his own shortcomings, of both a physical and intellectual nature (the latter which the skill of his own writing totally refutes). Probing deeply into the psyches of those whom he meets along the way, Herzog focuses on the inner workings of those whom he meets, so that the work is much more than a travelogue of places that are slightly off the beaten track, but more an exploration and unpicking of what makes America so exceptional—the individuals who, with their pioneering spirit, conquer all adversity to soar above the mundane into the realms of the metaphysical. He penetrates the core of what makes society tick, in terms of the conglomerate of personalities who form the backbone of the nation.

Reminiscent in parts of John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, *Turn Left at the Trojan Horse* is filled with down-home common sense. Only fleeting reference is made to road and weather conditions, just enough to keep the reader on track of the author's progress through the changing landscape. Such descriptions enable Herzog to focus in on one of his primary concerns, which is a desire to explore qualities of the human dynamic, relating the qualities found in those whom he encounters with those of mythical heroes and heroines in terms of both their failings and achievements. In an age in which much of mythology, that used to be force-fed to youngsters alongside the classics, is no longer the basic staple of a scholar's diet, Brad Herzog brings the doings of those on Mount Olympus to the level of everyday humanity whom he encounters in his travels across America.

In keeping with those in whose footsteps Herzog treads, such as the pioneering Lewis and Clark, dangers abound, no matter whether it is Brad's precipice-hugging drive down to Troy in his Winnebago Aspect, or his sitting upfront in a canoe steered by a pot-smoking reprobate. Yet home itself is always just around the corner, whether in Brad's revelations about his own life and home, or in the heartwarming anecdotes of the often whimsy-driven individuals whom he meets along the way.

No stranger to Hicksville, Herzog revels in small-town gossip that reveals so much of rural and relatively isolated communities. The broad-minded tolerance that he encounters in such places belies any vision that one might otherwise have of the antagonism that is sometimes reflected in the movie moguls' depiction of such a lifestyle (think only of John Boorman's epic movie of such a counter-culture in *Deliverance*, and you get the picture).

Citing philosophers, both ancient and modern, Herzog displays his erudition so succinctly and smoothly that the reader glides along, absorbing a wealth of information with a minimum of effort. The vibrancy of the text scintillates with meaning and veracity?in short, there is no room for pedantic self-importance here, with the author, at times, reminding one of an amiable and affable modern-day Americanized version of the delightfully eccentric Mr. Chips. Herzog is, after all, master of the literary device, including the anticlimax.

A book of tragedies and home truths, *Turn Left at the Trojan Horse* is a poetic rendition of fact. In addition, the work is extremely well edited?there are no trivialities here, with each part adding yet additional substance to the synchronized whole. The fluency of Herzog's writing is as smooth as well-churned butter and as pithy as the fibrous knots on an aged tree.

My only regret about the book is that it contains no index?I would have loved to have seen one referring to all the classical figures, place names and characters that Herzog meets with along the way. What would also have been most helpful in this cross-country expedition would have been a map showing the author's progress cross-state and county, indicating all his stop-off points.

Herzog's stylish and elegant prose carries you along, swept up in the pace, so that you find yourself crying over every tale of pathos and rejoicing over the slightest victory. The sense of boyish enthusiasm with which Herzog embarks on all his adventures is counterbalanced by his possession of a maturity beyond his years. While Herzog's journalistic background allows him to provide graphic accounts of natural disasters, including the havoc caused by the Grand Forks floods, and by the tornado that swept through Siren in 2001, his maverick tendencies enable him to set out intentionally to praise the merit-worthy and to describe the generally overlooked.

Whether you finish reading this volume sniggering away to yourself, or in pensive reflection, depends on you, but that the work is likely to leave you entertained, amused and deeply wondering about the habits and idiosyncrasies of modern-day rural Americans is certain. In brief, Brad Herzog's *Turn Left at the Trojan Horse: A Would-be Hero's American Odyssey* is a rollicking grand adventure, and one not to be missed!

Trenchologist says

3+ stars. Almost too clever at turns but always honest; touches on myths and myth-makers I've read but have their own framing in this "man, is this a midlife crisis or what" RV-driven navel gaze. There were moments of profundity that struck me as outside-himself epiphany (the real kind, not the Trite kind), interactions with people on travels & all the observations added good in/outward insights, but some of the noodling about what is/should be profound fell flat. A solid & enjoyable addition to the personal journey/travelogue.

(not a reread; started, got through about half & marked it, finished it quite a while later)

Drew says

A wonderful vacation read.

Aimee says

To call this "travel memoir" is euphemism. It makes the book sound quaint, but the writing is too good to be quaint, and the "journey" too profound to be categorized as "travel" (unless it's used with half-irony). And while it is indeed a memoir of literal travel, it's most memorable aspect is not the bemused meanderings through Small-Town USA. What grabs you is the story that is fascinatingly built around Homer's *Odyssey*; what holds you is the writing that is at times stunning; and what sticks with you long after you've turned the last page is the question that echos over and over again--what does it mean to live a heroic life?

Karl says

Turn Left at the Trojan Horse is Herzog at his best. A road trip story, a musing on the ancient world and how their values continue to influence us today, and a meditation on what is "a life well-lived" are just some of Herzog's themes. It's also a great look at pop culture and how it reflects the best and worst of our collective zeitgeist. It is at turns funny, pensive, and even melancholic. Herzog writes with a very self-deprecating yet self-aware voice. It might not hurt to have your *Meridian Handbook of Classical Literature* handy, but it's not really necessary as Herzog gives a little thumbnail summary of what we need to know as we visit with him the towns of Troy, Apollo, Siren, Sparta, Zip N.D. and many others. There's also a great reflection on his stint in the hot seat on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* and how an on air mention by Regis Philbin of his book *States of Mind* (another great road trip book by the way) instantly drove the book up Amazon's bestsellers list. I was one of those who helped in that cause (and followed him into the hot seat months later) and consequently was inspired to take several several road covering much of the same ground as Herzog. His descriptions of the landscape, the people he encounters and the road trip mindset are spot on. I highly recommend this book.

Katie Newton says

Having recently attended my first college reunion it was fun to read about another alumnus's adventurous journey back to the hill. The author's voice was introspective, but at the same time he gave careful consideration to the voice of every person he encountered. With each stop on his trip came a new idea of what it is to be a hero in modern American society--no definite conclusions at the end but LOTS to think about.

John says

Author does a good job of working the *Odyssey* theme into his trek, without seeming contrived; the memoir aspects flow well also. Compares favorably to the genre classic *Blue Highways*.

Kristine says

This review is LONG overdue!

I won this book through the First Reads lottery here on Good Reads. I have had this book for two months now. I was in the middle of *The Chronicles of Narnia* when I received it from the author and...well, you don't just put down *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I started it as soon as I was done with that book, though.

When I actually started it, I was completely enamored with the concept behind it. This is not my usual read. I'm more of a fiction loving book worm. That being said, Brad Herzog took this non-fiction account of his 30-day trip across the country in search of the answer to a question that was plaguing him (at nearly 40 and still unsure of what he had accomplished) and by extension his wife, Amy, who sent him on his journey and urged him to meet her at the end of it with some kind of peace about it. What Herzog wanted to know was, what makes a heroic life? or a life well lived? He sets out on his trip with the ultimate hero in mind, Odysseus. As he journeys through several small towns he interviews people along the way who, through their own stories of valor, help him piece together some kind of idea as to what is a life well-lived. Herzog also includes Greek myths in his writing, comparing towns with names like Pandora and Apollo to the traits, stories, etc. of their namesakes. At the end he comes away with a better understanding of what he considers a hero and how he can fill the role.

There are very few authors who make me sick with envy at their literary talent. F. Scott Fitzgerald and J.K. Rowling (as different as they both may be) are such authors, who make me want to both pen the next American Classic and never write again, because it just could never compare. I can add Herzog's name to this list. He made you feel like you were there with him, seeing it all and experiencing it all alongside him. The writing is beautiful, to say the least. I honestly think it was my favorite part of the book. Although, the different "everyday heroes," if you will, that he meets along the way are for the most part incredibly charming and yes, inspiring. The way he weaves Greek mythology into the stories of the people he meets and his own personal journey shows he knows his stuff (or at the very least, he did his research) and it is not only incredibly entertaining, but also very, very smart.

I love the honesty with which he opens up to the reader and shares what he feels are his shortcomings and where he feels he's gone wrong, or could do better. I really appreciated that it didn't read like he was *trying* to be deep.

The only thing within this book that left a bit of a sour taste in my mouth was that I didn't feel that Herzog, who is open about his religious beliefs as an atheist, was as open to hearing from the folks along his journey that represented matters of faith. I feel he was extremely cynical (which, much to his credit, he cops to) about most of the Christian-oriented groups he came across. It honestly comes off antagonistic at some points. Seeing as it was his journey, he was completely entitled to take that stance on any of the people he met, but it just came across as somewhat hypocritical that on a journey for knowledge that others may provide he disliked or was displeased with a place or a people, because they didn't meet his preconceived notions. With this I don't mean to say he was completely unfair to them. By his account some of the experiences were more than a little unsavory, but I think (and this may have to do with his own skepticism) that he went into certain situations where faith was concerned looking for flaws. At least that's how it read. To me personally. This isn't to discredit Herzog in any way.

I thoroughly enjoyed the book and would definitely recommend it to anyone, fiction and non-fiction lovers alike.

Brad Herzog says

Well, because I wrote this (May 2010 publication), and because I feel it may be my best work, I have to give it five stars -- or else my best isn't quite good enough.

On one level, **TURN LEFT AT THE TROJAN HORSE** chronicles my cross-country journey to Ithaca (New York) for a college reunion. But it is also a reimagining of Odysseus's ancient journey, as I pass through small towns with names like Troy (OR), Iliad (MT), Sparta (WI), and Apollo (PA), each with its own fascinating tale to tell.

The book's subtitle is "A Would-be Hero's American Odyssey," and indeed it is a memoir exploring the parameters of a heroic existence -- by delving into the lives of the folks in those tiny hamlets, by examining the universal truths embedded in ancient myths, and through a fair bit of self-evaluation. I would describe it as the memoir of an Everyman searching for the hero in himself.

You can take a look at a fun 2-minute video trailer about the book on my author page or by visiting my website (www.bradherzog.com) or my Facebook fan page ("Brad Herzog's books").
