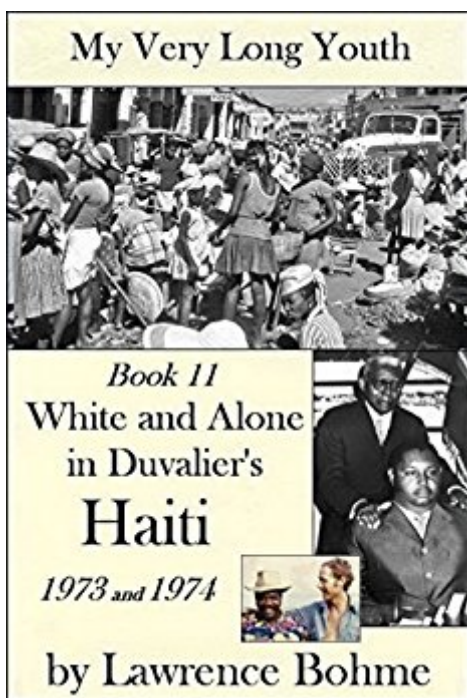


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White And Alone In "Baby Doc's" Haiti (My Very Long Youth, Book 11)



Synopsis

Book 11 of Lawrence's youthful adventures, 1973-74. Lawrence flies to Haiti with the plan of making his leather bags for men there using cheap local labour. On the plane he providentially meets a churchman from Indianapolis who takes an interest in his project and recommends him to a missionary outpost in the south, where he can make his home and workshop in a disused "nutritional center" if he will teach the peasants a trade. Soon Lawrence has six helpers, formerly sugar cane cutters including two part-time tailors, and a charming housekeeper, a protégée of the American church, who is charged with caring for him "as if he is your husband", and does with almost excessive zeal! Lawrence learns to speak creole with gusto (and disserts here on its many peculiarities) while, every afternoon when the workshop closes down, he mounts his small white horse "Blanc" to explore the farms and hills of the Momonce River valley and make many new friends. Learning that the shed he occupies was built by the Red Cross to be a "nutrition center" but then mysteriously abandoned, and seeing that many of the children who flock to meet the "blanc" have orange-hair and swollen bellies caused by lack of protein, he relaunches it at his own expense, but this ends in a fiasco when, to save money until a handbag payment arrives from New York, he follows the priest's advice by making the porridge with salt rather than the more expensive sugar, and the parents gather at his gate to angrily accuse his housekeeper of pocketing the difference. Lawrence wants to legalize his tourist status in the country and has his friend the priest in the next parish take him to request a work visa from Haiti's Interior Minister, who answers him with vague promises which turn out to be a trap. Lawrence's mother comes down to paint and, finding the farmlands too primitive, moves to the coastal town of Jacmel to run an outlet for his craftwork in ramshackle but beautiful twin houses. Lawrence's cook/mistress, afraid of being sent to take care of her far away rather than watch jealously over him in Darbonne, enlists the help of a voodoo priest but to no effect. His mother's innocent flirtation with the priest sours when, after she rejects his advances, the man plots to have Lawrence deported and his workshop "expropriated" by Duvalier's dreaded "Tonton Macoute" henchmen, on the orders of the very Interior Minister who was supposed to be legalizing his situation. Lawrence flees in the night in a loaded truck to Jacmel where he sets up his workshop in more civilized circumstances, selling his wares to adventurous tourists out of the Indigo Boutique managed by his mother. But the general situation in Haiti worsens with "communist" rebels in the hills trying to oust Baby Doc, and with heavy heart he gets out with whatever he can and heads for his next stop, Cartagena, Colombia. Lawrence Bohme's whimsically told but scrupulously faithful "personal history" of his first 41 years is entitled My Very Long Youth because "due to a force beyond my control I only started growing up, or

calming down, after that age". His erratic wanderings throughout the Western World, in the four decades following the war in the midst of which Lawrence was born, have been enough "without wasting a single word" to fill sixteen "novel-length" parts or "books" which explore the scope of his wanderlust and his insatiable curiosity for humankind in general "and women in particular". The eclectic author - "a half-European, half-American child of the second half of the 20th century" - describes his opus as simultaneously "a retrospective diary, an eye-witness history book, an artistic and photographic anthology, a one-way travel guide, a movie made from stills and, to put it as abstractly as possible, a partially-contrite confession of compulsive concupiscence"

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Customer Reviews

Very interesting read about life on an island full of contradictions. The author conveys all the complexities and simplicity of Haitian people which I have come to know through marriage and extended family ties. It is easy to recognize the real life cast of characters through his writing.

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