



Crossings: A Doctor-Soldier's Story

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Every juncture in Jon Kerstetter's life has been marked by a crossing from one world into another: from civilian to doctor to soldier; between healing and waging war; and between compassion and hatred of the enemy. When an injury led to a stroke that ended his careers as a doctor and a soldier, he faced the most difficult crossing of all, a recovery that proved as shattering as war itself.

Crossings is a memoir of an improbable, powerfully drawn life, one that began in poverty on the Oneida Reservation in Wisconsin but grew by force of will to encompass a remarkable medical practice. Trained as an emergency physician, Kerstetter's thirst for intensity led him to volunteer in war-torn Rwanda, Kosovo, and Bosnia, and to join the Army National Guard. His three tours in the Iraq War marked the height of the American struggle there. The story of his work in theater, which involved everything from saving soldiers' lives to organizing the joint U.S.–Iraqi forensics team tasked with identifying the bodies of Saddam Hussein's sons, is a bracing, unprecedented evocation of a doctor's life at war.

But war was only the start of Kerstetter's struggle. The stroke he suffered upon returning from Iraq led to serious cognitive and physical disabilities. His years-long recovery, impeded by near-unbearable pain and complicated by PTSD, meant overcoming the perceived limits of his body and mind and re?? imagining his own capacity for renewal and change. It led him not only to writing as a vocation but to a deeper understanding of how healing means accepting a new identity, and how that acceptance must be fought for with as much tenacity as any battlefield victory.

Crossings: A Doctor-Soldier's Story Details

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From Reader Review Crossings: A Doctor-Soldier's Story for online ebook

Kathleen Kline says

This is a good book. When I got to the end I found it all the more amazing how well written it is once I knew about the author's struggles after suffering a stroke. The parts about the war are brutal at times, but so is war, so it gave greater clarity on the effects war has on those who have to fight in it. There is so much in this book that I find it hard to give it an adequate review without "writing a book." I will say that knowing what I know at the end of the book, I think I would almost like to read it again for greater appreciation.

E.P. says

"Crossings" is subtitled "A Doctor-Soldier's Story," but there's much more to it than that. It chronicles Jon Kerstetter's service as a flight surgeon in Iraq, but it also tells the story of his whole life, in which his tours in Iraq are just a small part.

The son of a single mother from the Oneida reservation, Kerstetter dreamed of becoming a doctor from childhood, but had to overcome a series of obstacles first. In college he was steered away from medicine, because, he was told, Native students couldn't handle the coursework. He only ended up going to medical school more than a decade later. He was also initially steered away from the military, finally enlisting in the National Guard at an age when many soldiers are already eligible to retire.

Once there, though, he found his calling in emergency medicine, often in areas in crisis. He discusses how he was drawn to high-adrenaline environments where he could make a difference, volunteering to go first to Rwanda following the genocide there, and then to the Balkans. While his experiences there were humbling, he also found them rewarding, and welcomed the chance to go to Iraq and use his skills there.

Some of Kerstetter's experiences in Iraq were truly bizarre, and must be read to be believed, but the real adventure begins when he returns home and has to deal with a myriad of crippling health problems. The fact that he completed the book at all is a testament to his will to succeed.

"Crossings" refers to the different border crossings, physical, psychological, and spiritual, that Kerstetter makes throughout his life, as he transitions from poor kid from the res to doctor and soldier and then to patient. The prose style is for the most part simple and direct--Kerstetter writes like the doctor and soldier he considers himself to be--but some of his meditations on the changes he undergoes in his life are profound, and will probably resonate with many doctors, soldiers, and patients dealing with life-altering conditions. An affecting story about an interesting life.

My thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for providing a review copy of this book. All opinions are my own.

Katie says

Very informative and moving in places. Dr. Kerstetter is very knowledgeable and the stories he told about Iraq were fascinating. I was impressed that he was able to recall such detail. Though this is obviously a memoir about him and his life, I would have liked to hear more about his wife, Collin.

She was willing to move around the country while he did his med school internships. She was often alone with a small child while he was in medical school. When he deployed, she was left behind to care for 4 children. When he fell ill, she drove him to his appointments and suffered at his side. She's the other hero in this story. At times, he seemed callous and unfeeling regarding his family and being away. I have mixed feelings about that, but overall, a solid memoir.

Robert Luebke says

Crossings is a great autobiography by Dr. Jon R. Kerstetter who faced immeasurable odds all his life and presents his drive and determination to overcome them. Jon Kerstetter was born and raised during his early years on the Oneida Indian Reservation in Wisconsin. Jon and his brother and sister were raised by his mother, a single parent, in what most would describe as extreme poverty. Jon was stricken by diphtheria at an early age and was treated by a very kind and compassionate physician who treated Jon at home. It was this experience that made Jon want to become a medical doctor, an almost impossible dream for anyone in Jon's circumstances. Jon Kerstetter overcame these odds, graduating from Mayo Medical School in 1988. After additional training, Jon served as an emergency room physician during his early years of medical practice. However, Dr. Kerstetter felt the need to serve humanity and takes you along with him for tours in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo and hurricane disaster in Honduras. He served three tours with the U.S. Army as a combat physician and flight surgeon and provides the reader with the raw emotions involved in the difficult decisions combat soldier doctors often had to make. Facing hard challenges all his life, perhaps the most difficult one was the recovery and rehabilitation from an injury on active duty and a stroke when jeopardized his military and medical career. After reading this autobiography, I am amazed at the strength of Dr. Kerstetter's resolve to overcome all the obstacles he faced in his life.

Marika says

There are many stories written about war but this book is unique in that it's written by a Dr. whose mission was to heal, and to kill. Kerstetter, a native American who is a member of Oneida Tribe, holds nothing back recounting his 3 tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. The goal of a Dr. is to save lives, but at what point is life salvageable? Deciding when a body is compatible with life was something that he dealt with on a daily basis and one that almost guaranteed that he would suffer from PTSD. He endured all the horrors of war, only to be diagnosed with an aneurysm and had a debilitating stroke that prevented him from practicing medicine. This is the rare mixture of medicine and philosophy, combined with being a gripping war memoir that doesn't blink from the horrific scenes. Scenes that you can not turn away from, as much as you want to.

I received an advance copy and was not compensated.

Janet says

This was a 4 out of 5 stars read for me.

A soldier. A doctor. How do you reconcile the two? Especially in a war-torn country when doctors are to "do no harm," but a soldier must "shoot to kill." This was an interesting read from a man that had to experience both. How do you ever live with yourself once you have had to live on both sides of the battle lines? What do you do once you have suffered a catastrophic medical condition and can no longer do either? How do you define yourself then? Where do you put your memories, your anger, your frustration and even your grief and loss when you CAN'T leave it on a battlefield? When your LIFE becomes the battlefield? Join Jon Kerstetter on his journey to hell and back in his emotional novel *Crossings* and bear witness to his struggles once released on September 5, 2017.

I received an ARC in exchange for an honest and unbiased review. I would like to thank Netgalley, Crown Publishing Group, and Jon Kerstetter for the opportunity to visit both sides of this difficult encounter.

lovemonicarose says

Finally finished this book omg. It felt long and I thought tedious at times but it was such a great story. It was scary at times but also full of hope in the end. It made me appreciate medical careers and how much being one can be so much a part of an identity. It was inspirational and I'm glad I read this, life can be daunting but the right mindset does work.

Lee Woodruff says

Growing up on an Indian reservation, Kerstetter understood the meaning of boundaries and was determined not to be defined by them. Breaking free of societal expectations he excelled in every aspect of his life, going from college graduate to business executive to a medical doctor at the age of 37. Frustrated by the mundane cases passing through his ER, Kerstetter yearned to do more with his life and at the age of 42, he was commissioned in the Iowa National guard as a flight surgeon. His career as a military doctor took him to many foreign lands, conflicts and wars. Yet at the peak of his career, a stroke put an end to the life he had known, leaving him in pain and with many deficits. His next chapter would be the soul-crushing battle to recover and reclaim his identity.

This beautifully written memoir takes us through an amazing and somewhat improbable life while trying to explain the complex and contradictory relationship between killing and healing. "It's natural and unnatural, that genetic code, to know as much about killing as healing, to listen for sounds of bullets in one moment and then listen for the sounds of the wounded in the next...pull a trigger, pack a wound," writes the author. Indeed.

Gina says

I received a copy of this book through NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

I just finished reading this book, and I am completely floored. Kerstetter 's telling of his journey is unlike anything that I have ever read before and the results are a truly remarkable book. I have read a lot of books

that are memoirs centering around the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this one brings a unique perspective to the journey, delivered through top-notch writing. The author's power as a gifted storyteller brings you in for a front row seat as he relives the most difficult parts of his life.

The book starts out with the author's early life, progressing up to the point where he becomes a doctor. Once a doctor, he finds himself bored with routine treatment and seeking experience with treating critical trauma patients, which ultimately leads him into military service. The book delves into areas I never thought about a soldier/doctor performing. Most notably, he is entrusted with overseeing the process of positively identifying high priority enemy targets (Uday and Qusay Hussein) post mortem, and the transfer of their remains back to the Hussein family.

I am not sure if it is the author's training as a doctor, his struggles with recovering from his stroke, or a little bit of both that give him the insight and perspective to explore his journey in the way he does, but I was drawn into the story and the writing from the beginning. He doesn't tell us about his PTSD, but rather he shows how it affects him and his recovery, as well as how hard he struggles to push the memories down and keep them inside. He is also able to (somehow) make the reader understand the pull back to war and how it can be stronger than the thoughts of the family and his civilian life waiting for him at home.

Perhaps the most remarkable is how he depicts his recovery as a stroke victim - I felt the frustration of knowing what he used to be capable of, and the feeling of failure when his body and mind won't cooperate in the ways that he remembers. As I was reading this portion, I couldn't help but marvel that the man going through this recovery actually wrote the amazing book that I was reading.

Sometimes a book comes along that makes me wish I could give it more than 5 stars, because it truly seems deserving of more - on a scale of 1 to 5 this is a 7!

Scott County Library System says

Jon Kerstetter's biography weaves a tale of war, healing, love, loss, family and determination so compelling it will resonate long after the last page. Born on a Native American reservation, Kerstetter frames his life as a series of boundary crossings. Crossing from Native American roots into the wider U.S., crossing from poverty into medical school and international medicine, crossing from doctor and healer to soldier and killer. Poignant, incisive sentences cut like surgeon's knife describing his three tours in Iraq as: "life and death played out within the walls of a hospital tent and within the depths of human hearts." (p. 297) The atrocities of war led to another crossing in his mind; into a base hatred of his enemy and struggles with PTSD. What makes this work truly amazing is the fact that Kerstetter suffered a stroke after returning from Iraq and experienced a variety of cognitive barriers. His sheer persistence in writing such a beautiful book is something to admire. In his words: "I am that person who, by the force of loss, has had to learn the force of resilience. At times I was defeated and adrift. But I learned to keep pushing against the boundaries that emerged, the real and the imagined, crossing them where I could..." (p. 335). Kerstetter's story is that of one Midwestern life, but it is also the story of humanity pushing boundaries, seeking more, and dreaming big dreams.

Review by Christine Barth - Librarian, Scott County Library System

Julie Barrett says

I received this book by entering a Goodreads giveaway. I entered the giveaway because the book blurb seemed intriguing- the goals of a doctor and of a soldier are diametrically opposed. One takes lives and the other tries to save lives. A memoir discussing the conflicts between the two seemed worth checking out.

I struggled to finish this book. Usually a book this length is something I read in 2 days, not 2 weeks. I found myself doing anything other than picking up this book - checking email, playing solitaire, even doing the dishes. They were all more appealing than reading this book. It was only my compulsion to finish every book I start that caused me to plow through and finish.

Once I got to the part of the book where the author suffers a major stroke, I felt like a jerk for critiquing the book and finding it poorly written and organized. If I had known that fact from the beginning I would have cut him more slack. I mean, as a book written by someone who suffered a stroke less than 10 years ago and lost the ability to read and write, this memoir deserves a 4 or 5 star rating. It's impressive he could recover enough to write this. However, if I am not grading on a curve then the memoir earns 1 or 2 stars. I give it 2 stars for having an fascinating premise. It's the execution of the premise that is no good. Just because someone has lived a compelling life doesn't automatically make them a good writer.

Valerie says

This book intrigued me as someone who works in rehabilitative services. I wanted to read about the patient's experiences and learn from his comments. I had no idea that he was located in my home state, which added to my interest. Jon's story is unique - he has a world of experience and shared it in a unique way. Sometimes he got a bit wordy for me, but I never lost interest in his story.

Mark Crouse says

A lesson in perserverance, unselfish sacrifice and bravery!

I'm a non intellectual who loves to read about super achievers and their successes. I come from a family with a few of those types. A medical doctor, a couple of dentists, a clinical psychologist and a biomedical research scientist, I'm their uncle. A former combat (infantry) soldier, who did a 16 month tour in Vietnam and Cambodia and retired from a career in law enforcement. I watched my nieces and nephews meet the challenges both physically and mentally to aspire and meet their academic and professional goals. One of them, a dentist, is currently in the Air Force stationed in Manheim Germany. Dr. Kerstetter's story gave me a lot of insight into what a human being can achieve through desire and self motivation. His sacrifice and unselfish commitment to serve as a combat Doctor saving lives, when he could have comfortably stayed home with his family and practiced medicine never to experience danger. Then to have him tell about his medical and physical challenges that eventually ended his career as a Doctor and how he went through therapy and struggled to gain back a somewhat normal life. It is an inspiring story that I'm sure is an inspiration to those who have been confronted with similar challenges.

Christine says

Jon Kerstetter's biography weaves a tale of war, healing, love, loss, family and determination so compelling it will resonate long after the last page. Born on a Native American reservation, Kerstetter frames his life as a series of boundary crossings. Crossing from Native American roots into the wider U.S., crossing from poverty into medical school and international medicine, crossing from doctor and healer to soldier and killer. Poignant, incisive sentences cut like surgeon's knife describing his three tours in Iraq as: "life and death played out within the walls of a hospital tent and within the depths of human hearts." (p. 297) The atrocities of war led to another crossing in his mind; into a base hatred of his enemy and struggles with PTSD. What makes this work truly amazing is the fact that Kerstetter suffered a stroke after returning from Iraq and experienced a variety of cognitive barriers. His sheer persistence in writing such a beautiful book is something to admire. In his words: "I am that person who, by the force of loss, has had to learn the force of resilience. At times I was defeated and adrift. But I learned to keep pushing against the boundaries that emerged, the real and the imagined, crossing them where I could..." (p. 335). Kerstetter's story is that of one Midwestern life, but it is also the story of humanity pushing boundaries, seeking more, and dreaming big dreams.

Review by Christine Barth - Librarian, Scott County Library System

Liz says

This is not a topic I would normally pick up a book about - soldier doctor, stroke recovery patient, medicine and war. I read it because the author is the father of one of my sisters best friends - I know parts of his story from small interactions with him and was intrigued on a personal level.

The story is fascinating and well woven. Kerstetter talks about the dilemma of being a soldier trained to kill and a doctor trained to kill at the same time and the pulls in different directions. I found a lot of the war stories hard to read - again, this is not something I would normally choose to read about. The most impactful parts were his discussion of identity after his stroke and I enjoyed reading the last half of the book immensely.

This would be a higher rating for me personally if it were more in my wheelhouse topic wise - the story is well shared and worth sharing. If this topic in any way interests you, definitely pick this one up!
