



Love in the Driest Season: A Family Memoir

Neely Tucker

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Against a background of war, terrorism, disease and unbearable uncertainty about the future, this story of how a foreign correspondent and his wife fought to adopt a Zimbabwean baby emerges as an inspiring testament to the miracles that love and dogged determination can sometimes achieve. Don't miss this gripping memoir.

Foreign correspondent Neely Tucker and his wife, Vita, arrived in Zimbabwe in 1997. After witnessing firsthand the devastating consequences of AIDS on the population, especially the children, the couple started volunteering at an orphanage that was desperately underfunded and short-staffed. One afternoon, a critically ill infant was brought to the orphanage from a village outside the city. She'd been left to die in a field on the day she was born, abandoned in the tall brown grass that covers the highlands of Zimbabwe in the dry season. After a near-death hospital stay, and under strict doctor's orders, the ailing child was entrusted to the care of Tucker and Vita. Within weeks Chipo, the girl-child whose name means gift, would come to mean everything to them.

Still an active correspondent, Tucker crisscrossed the continent, filing stories about the uprisings in the Congo, the civil war in Sierra Leone, and the postgenocidal conflict in Rwanda. He witnessed heartbreaking scenes of devastation and violence, steeling him further to take a personal role in helping anywhere he could. At home in Harare, Vita was nursing Chipo back to health. Soon she and Tucker decided to alter their lives forever—they would adopt Chipo. That decision challenged an unspoken social norm—that foreigners should never adopt Zimbabwean children.

Raised in rural Mississippi in the sixties and seventies, Tucker was familiar with the mores associated with and dictated by race. His wife, a savvy black woman whose father escaped the Jim Crow South for a new life in the industrial North, would not be deterred in her resolve to welcome Chipo into their loving family.

As if their situation wasn't tenuous enough, Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe was stirring up national fervor against foreigners, especially journalists, abroad and at home. At its peak, his antagonizing branded all foreign journalists personae non grata. For Tucker, the only full-time American correspondent in Zimbabwe, the declaration was a direct threat to his life and his wife's safety, and an ultimatum to their decision to adopt the child who had already become their only daughter.

Against a background of war, terrorism, disease, and unbearable uncertainty about the future, Chipo's story emerges as an inspiring testament to the miracles that love—and dogged determination—can sometimes achieve. Gripping, heartbreaking, and triumphant, this family memoir will resonate throughout the ages.

Love in the Driest Season: A Family Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Love in the Driest Season: A Family Memoir for online ebook

Becca says

My experience with international adoption had inspired a hunger to read as many other stories that I can. This one is one of my favorite!

Danielle Palmer says

This was a gripping read, but was overshadowed by the authors need to describe every death he encountered as a war correspondent in grizzly detail. He also chronicles the death of each infant in the orphanage much the same. In this case, less would have been more. Describe a couple and then move forward with the story! This book does a very good job of showing the obstacles one faces when trying to help in a foreign country (in his case, attempting to adopt). Worth the read, but prepare for some gore filled descriptions along the way.

Jessica says

A moving tale of a bi-racial couple from America who meet a dying baby in an orphanage in Zimbabwe who takes there hearts. They begin a seemingly impossible struggle to save her while racing against the clock because of the husband's status as person non grata - he's a foreign correspondent during a time when the press are being blamed for all of the country's woes. This is so well written - and brought tears to my eyes twice within the first 25 pages. The author also gives a good background on the AIDS crisis that was crushing Zimbabwe. I'd recommend this to all to read but in particular if you're interested in adoption, foreign adoption, international affairs, race relations, the AIDS crisis, Africa, or public health. Or if you just want a good, well told memoir.

Judy Collins says

Review to follow!

Dreamer says

Uma história verdadeira passada no Zimbabue, onde se mostra o amor e a coragem de um casal que decide ficar com uma criança contra todas as burocracias.

Michelle Commeyras says

I decided to read this memoir because it is about a time in Zimbabwe that I have some first hand knowledge of. I was visiting Zimbabwe between 1997 - 2000 prior to Mugabe's decision to take back the lands from White farmers. Neely Tucker and his wife were living there at that time and in this memoir you experience their frustration with bureaucracy and suspicion of American's through their efforts to adopt Chipo who was abandoned as an infant. Also of interest was the harrowing experiences Tucker has as a journalist. Really this is a testament to how loving a child will give one the strength to face all manner of adversity.

Irene says

Story of love and courage amongst the worst calamities of our time. I found myself wishing this book were longer. I'd love to read a second book beginning where this one left off.

Karin says

A couple is trying to adopt a dying child. But with Zimbabwe's slow child welfare department it seems like it takes forever for the system to get its act together. Along with this story is the one about the children dying in droves due to the Aids epidemic. Unfortunately the living family members can only do so much to assist their young relatives and many end up in Child Orphanages thru-out the country. When the Tuckers try to help their local orphanage by buying baby supplies, they are stolen within a short time.

Well written story.

Leza says

I read this over a long weekend; it was so engaging and fascinating that I couldn't put it down. I read a lot of travel literature and picked this book up because of its theme of Zimbabwe. Don't simply judge the book by the cover (some will do) because this is an incredible insight in to the life of a foreign correspondent as well as an education in to the country of Zimbabwe, adoption and the African AIDs crisis (of which I was very aware after volunteering for several months in a remote Ugandan hospital in the early 90s, specifically in the childrens' ward). It is a book of perseverance, determination and patience; of first hand accounts from war and disease ravaged countries, of interracial narratives from the Deep South of the US to the African continent, of overwhelming bureaucracy and propaganda. It is also a book about love and how it can affect you, about need; not just Chipo's need as an orphan but the author's need to emotionally reconnect after becoming desensitised from years of reporting on the devastating ugliness of human nature. I wish Chipo, Neely and her incredible mum Vita a wonderful future together. Theirs is a story that needs to heard to enlighten the rest of us.

Toni Aucoin says

This is the story of white American journalist and his black wife who are living in Africa. They spend time helping with the many babies and children orphaned by the AIDS epidemic in the 90's. AIDS in the late 80's through the 90's had more than 11 million children orphaned, 95% of those were in sub-Saharan Africa. The book deals with the struggles they had trying to adopt a little girl, who, would have died without their help and desire for a child. It paints an ugly picture of Africa and their murderous leaders who would rather let these children die than let Americans adopt them. Frankly, it just paints an ugly picture.

Sharon Barrow Wilfong says

If I could give this book twice as many stars, I would. It is one of the most harrowing, riveting, heartbreaking and beautifully breathtaking books I have ever read and I believe every single person out there needs to read it too.

I remember the eighties when we were at the height of anti-South African sentiment as everyone self-righteously condemned apartheid. It has now been thirty years since South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe have been freed from their white tyrants and have been governed by native Africans. How many people who decried white racism has followed up on those countries and studied their conditions today? How many people care?

If you read this book you will care. If you're like me you'll want to race to Zimbabwe or the other countries and adopt a boat load of children.

Except you can't. Not in Zimbabwe anyway, which is where this story takes place.

Neely Tucker was a foreign correspondent who with his wife, Vita, lived in Zimbabwe for a number of years while he covered news about African countries. The AIDS epidemic had wiped out a whole generation of parents leaving a generation of orphans. These babies were often left out for exposure and, if found, put in one of the orphanages that were already overflowing with orphans with few workers, less qualified workers, and hardly formula or medicine for the infants, all who were sick, many infected with HIV. The death rate was horrific. Children died every week.

One would think that a desperate situation like this would make the government grateful for people who wanted to adopt. Guess again. Neeley and Vita started volunteering at a nearby orphanage, contributing what supplies they could and bringing orphans home on the weekends to give the exhausted workers a break. They fell in love with a baby, Chipa.

Chipa had been found in the desert, a newborn with the umbilical still attached, covered with ants. She was screaming as the ants bit her. She, fortunately was discovered, but how many weren't and suffered an agonizing death?

Neeley and Vita began the process to adopt but were told that foreigners were not allowed to adopt native children. So they decided to foster. This also proved almost impossible as the bureaucratic monster caused progress to inch along. I won't bore you with the tedious details, the hours they waited in line to get paper work done, only to have the paper work "lost" or "misplaced" the next time and they'd have to start all over

again.

This went on for several months and in the meantime they came across a little boy they loved. They started the process with him as well. First they were able to take him home for the weekends. Like Chipa, he was grossly malnourished and ill but he rallied and become a bouncing baby.

Then he died. They called the orphanage to get him and were casually informed of his death.

Now this is all sad enough, but the worst is the nightmarish violence that was happening all over Africa as militants slaughtered their way through towns and villages. As a correspondent he was called upon to report all of this. He saw charred remains of women, still holding their babies; he was standing near rubble from a terrorist explosion when he felt a crunch beneath his foot. He looked down to see that he had stepped into the rib cage of a dead child.

When I read about what is going on over there I get mad when citizens of my country talk as if they're living in some kind of dystopian reality because they don't like who got elected president. Go live in any African country for a while. It might give you some refreshing perspective.

Ironically, the President of Zimbabwe treated his people the way he accused the white supremacist government of acting. When President Mugabe was a reporter in the sixties he was jailed and tortured. As President he was the one arresting African journalists and torturing them. I'm sure when he was a school teacher, he was a good teacher. When he was a reporter he was probably a good one. As a president, he was incompetent.

And he was corrupt. Securing kickbacks for his cronies and family, he lived palatially while his countrymen starved. When people began protesting he needed a scapegoat. Foreigners were handy and so were African journalists. Both were "defaming his character" and turning public opinion against him.

People were tired of his rants and when he decided to pass a law that would allow the government to confiscate land from the remaining white farmers, no one was impressed and he was voted out.

Except he did not go out. He sent henchmen on killing sprees and held another election. He was still voted out. Again he sent henchmen who murdered most of his opposition. He won and was the longest ruling African governor (first as Prime Minister, then as President) until he died last year (2017).

I do not know how the Tuckers endured so much for so many months for the sake of Chipa. I would have had a nervous break down. But they stuck it out and are the proud parents of a beautiful girl.

Tucker's writing is fluid and alive. You are no longer where ever you are sitting to read the book. You are in Africa and you can see the people and the Veldt and the heat and the desperation of so many lives.

This is probably going to the top of my favorite books for this year and if I could, I would buy every single one of you a copy.

Sharon says

This is such a compelling story that paucity of dialogue wasn't such a detractant, although I noticed it

throughout. The story is told by a journalist, thus it reads more like the account that it is instead of a fictional story. And it's a powerful story indeed. The reader feels frustration and numbing realities along with the author. I loved this story. It's well worth the read; I listened to it on CD. The reader learns along the way, always a good thing. And the realities in Africa are chilling. This is a historical snapshot in time as well as a family memoir. I have deep respect and admiration for the author and his wife after reading this account.

Books like this one bring us greater understanding of the world than we'll ever find in the nightly news in America or in newspapers. Stories like this one bring situations to a personal level, something we tend to forget that every situation really is. We need more stories like this, though the dangers to those who report them are overwhelming. Thanks to all brave enough to bring us stories of stark reality, and those brave enough to make a difference in even one life.

Jessica says

I really enjoyed this book, even though I wasn't actually expecting to. It's written by a journalist, so it's a little factual at times, but it still captured my interest from the beginning, and held it until the end..

It gave me a greater appreciation for journalists and all that they do, and also put faces on the shocking statistics of the number of orphans in Zimbabwe alone. It was comforting to know that at least one found a safe place to grow up and a family to call her own, thanks to the determination and perseverance of one couple.

Andrea Dowd says

Book Three of Summer Reading List.

I got this book two years ago (maybe three) and never picked it up because I wasn't really interested in reading about families, adoption, or babies in Africa. I only plucked it from my shelves this summer so that I could fit in my one "must read" non-fiction for summer. And I was EXTREMELY SURPRISED AT HOW MUCH I LIKED IT!

Neely Tucker is a white southern journalist who is married to Vita, a black, Detroit woman. After moving around the world, Tucker is posted in Zimbabwe. During the mid-late 90s, he and his wife are moved to help the smallest victims of the African AIDS crisis-the orphans and infants often clinging to the smallest thread of hope for life.

They discover Chipu, an abandoned little girl barely weighing four pounds and upon death's door. It is here where the story begins as they struggle just to keep the baby alive and then their story becomes one of keeping the baby. "Love in the Driest Season" is a story about Neely and Vita's fight to this child they fell in love with against all odds. Between the government, horrific scenes of neglect and hopelessness, and their own personal hurdles, Neely Tucker somehow drew me in and made me fall in love not only with Chipu but with Vita and himself.

As hopeless as a memoir about adoption in Africa amidst the AIDS crisis and the ruling of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe may seem, it is a strong testament to perseverance, faith, dedication, and of course, love.

Read this book...anyone who likes any kind of writing...even if you don't care about babies, adoption, AIDS, or Africa-this might change your mind.

Saleh MoonWalker says

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