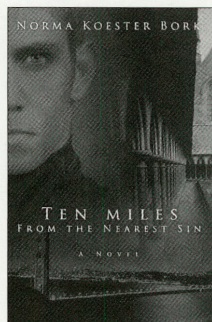


BOOK REVIEWS ■ recent fiction

Ten Miles from the Nearest Sin

Deceit, duplicity, despair, and denial | REVIEWED BY MARGIE SCHUTTE



Ten Miles from the Nearest Sin (Enum-claw, Wash.: Winepress, 2006), by Norma Koester Bork

This book contains deceit, duplicity, despair, and denial—all ingredients of a scandal-filled novel, albeit set in a conservative Christian organization—the End Time Church.

Norma Bork's story begins in Silver Spring, Maryland, with ten-year-old Jack, son of a high End Time Christian Church official, being sexually abused in secret by a friendly military neighbor. Set in the decades between the 1930s and 1960s, the book traces the lifelong devastation not only to Jack and his parents but also to his many female contacts through the years.

When teenage Jack's internal rage causes him to violently assault a fifteen-year-old female and fellow church member, he avoids the police by lying about his age and joining the army. His father's well-meaning but misguided efforts to help his son put Jack under the control of the abusive general and his escape to the war becomes another nightmare.

After his discharge, Jack is unable to meet the entrance requirements of a secular college. His father again pulls strings to get Jack accepted at the End Time Missionary College outside Washington, D.C.

On a date with Kathryn, a dormitory student at Halcyon Hall, he persuades her to walk down to Sligo Creek. There he forces himself on her and violently batters and rapes her, leaving her lying alone near the creek bed. A doctor from nearby End Time Sanitarium and Hospital finds her and takes her there for treatment. The college dean of women advises her

to return home with her parents for it would be out of the question for her to remain at the school, according to the customs of that time.

After receiving a few phone calls from Jack's father in defense of his son and after placing blame on Kathryn, the college's executive committee decides Jack has received punishment enough by missing classes for three days. Jack's plea for leniency so that this incident will not jeopardize his chances to go into the "Lord's work" is honored. In order to protect their reputations, neither the college nor the hospital report this crime to the authorities for



Miles from Angwin, California?

fear it will get into the press.

Meanwhile, Kathryn returns home with her parents only to find herself pregnant. Her parents, hoping to protect her from perceived shame, arrange a loveless marriage to an older fellow believer.

Seven years later, the scene shifts to California, where, ironically, Kathryn and her daughter, Karis, have a surprise encounter with Jack at a school conference, where he is

educational supervisor for the End Time elementary schools in central California.

Fast forward to 1968—Saint Helena, California—End Time College, where Jack's father manages to pull a few more strings to get his son a position as academic dean. The story continues with the trials and temptations of faculty and students, where, unknown to each other, Jack and Karis (a premed student) cross paths again.

Bork expertly mixes prayer sessions, teaching Sabbath School lessons, and incidents of raw sex and violence as the controversy between good and evil is played out to its dramatic conclusion. It may take some readers by surprise that this occurs on a Christian campus. The law of consequences and ultimate redemption are realistically portrayed.

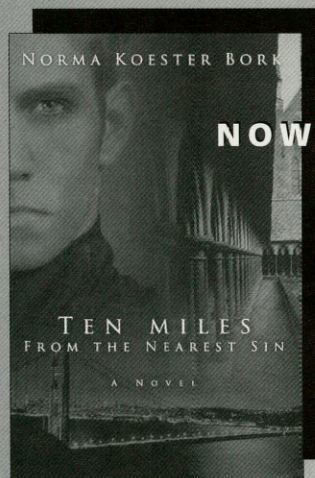
It was well into the book that I understood the meaning of the title. A comment by a nonbelieving sheriff who investigated an attempted rape near the Saint Helena campus said about the End Time Christians, "They like to think they're ten miles from the nearest sin, but they're not." He angrily accuses the End Time Church officials of "denying and covering up anything that goes wrong."

Although the author states the book is "completely fiction," one wonders why she chose to have the geographic settings and customs of the End Time Christian Church so closely resemble the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The location of the church headquarters, the General "Assembly," the colleges, the Sanitarium and Hospital, Sligo Creek, Loma Linda, Saint Helena, Halcyon Hall all are familiar names to most informed Adventists.

Bork has courageously scripted the lifelong and far-reaching devastating effects of childhood sexual abuse that exist within a conservative Christian church. She accurately notes the reluctance of the Christian community to acknowledge this evil within its midst. She is to be commended for bringing to light a very serious cancer within the church that has the potential for destroying not only the victims but the organization itself.

Although the book is set several decades ago, unfortunately the abuse and the manner in which it is handled, in many cases, is not that different today, which makes this story a relevant and compelling read. ■

Margie Sabah Schutte is a nurse and counselor with a dedicated interest in helping victims of childhood sexual abuse by church officials. She and her pediatrician husband live in Weaverville, North Carolina.



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