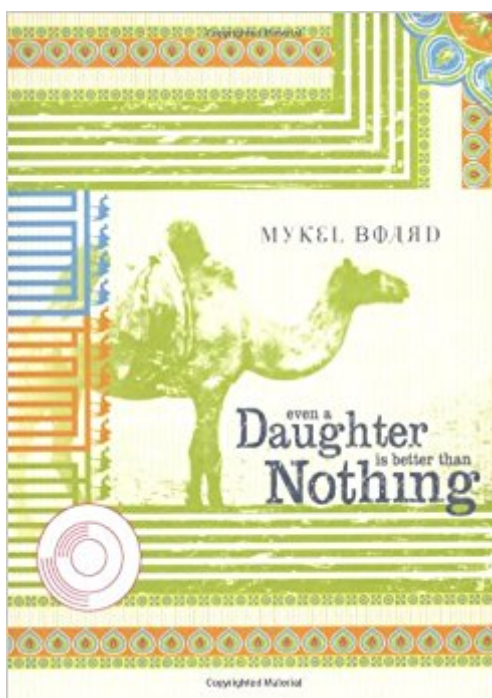


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Even A Daughter Is Better Than Nothing



Synopsis

This is the story of how Maximum Rock'n'Roll Columnist Mykel Board spent a year teaching English at the Mongolian National University in Ulaanbaatar. From getting lost in the Gobi Desert to stirring fights in a Mongolian disco, Board teeters through the heart of contemporary Mongolian culture with the class, humor and buffoonery of a modern-day Charlie Chaplin.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The complex beauty, poverty and isolation of Mongolia captured Board's imagination for decades. He finally arranged a year-long teaching post there in 1995, after acquiring a master's in linguistics, touring in a punk rock band and developing a reputation as a reactionary San Francisco writer. The Byzantine trip to Ulaanbataar previews the surreal experience of living in a country where nothing works ("it doesn't matter how many Mongolians it takes to change a lightbulb. The new one won't work either")—not the plumbing, electricity, the security guards or the government. Yet despite the hardships of a winter that lasts from September to June, a constant barrage of language and domestic problems, and the unavailability of sexual partners of either gender (Board constantly seeks sex), the author becomes fully engaged in the intricacies of the country's customs. He participates in a sheep-killing ritual, plunges headlong into a wrestling competition, drinks Genghis Khan vodka and slogs through the mud of the town of Moron. When he returns to the sterile environs of New York, he plots his next trip to the ends of the earth. Board's scatology may offend some readers, and his obsession with sex parallels his obsession with Mongolia in this highly colloquial travel memoir. Photos. (Nov. 20) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division

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Those of you familiar with Mykel Board as the elder statesman of punk and agitator emeritus for MAXIMUM ROCK 'N ROLL, should now get ready to meet Mykel Board— a world traveler, cultural investigator and English teacher. Mykel brings his unique and often inflammatory world view with him everywhere he lands and the Mongol hordes will never be the same. (Dale Ashmun, SCREW Magazine) As if The Travels of Marco Polo had been written by Sir Richard Burton. (Bob Black) At a time when travel writing has become a mere showcase for an author's endless philosophizing, Mykel Board's book is a refreshingly philosophy free recounting of people and events in deepest Mongolia, especially dear to those of who will never get there ourselves. The style is clean and direct, the viewpoint both dispassionate and loving, and there is no patronizing analysis of a foreign world on display. It's funny and true— some people may find Board eccentric, but I find his bent point of view remarkably sane. (Jennifer Blowdryer, NY Press)

Didn't love the book, and the author was pretty despicable, but I did learn about the country. There are some amusing parts, and he wasn't afraid to expose himself and his thoughts, so that is something!

For years Mykel Board had wanted to go to Outer Mongolia. He realized that dream in 1995 when he went there to teach English at the National University in Ulaanbaatar. EVEN A DAUGHTER IS BETTER THAN NOTHING is the result of his stay. This volume is not like any other travel writing you will read. It is at once hilarious, I suspect at times hyperbolic as well as downright moving in places. He writes with obvious affection for the people he encountered on his year there; and even though he lands in a country far removed from anything he has even encountered--"this is Mongolia"-- he is never condescending. Public transportation doesn't run on time, the plumbing doesn't work, classes are scheduled in the wrong classrooms, and signs saying someone takes credit cards usually don't mean that at all as Mr. Board repeatedly hears the mantra "this is Mongolia." What the writer does find is a lovable people not afraid of hard work and accepting of strangers. They dress up to have a photo taken, are offended if you do not eat their food-- even though you prefer not to eat unadorned fat-- poor Mr. Board at times reminded me a little of Cool Hand Luke's stuffing himself with eggs in the movie by the same name-- and can drink you under the table. These folks drink vodka like Americans drink Cokes. (I'm surprised that Mr. Board had a liver when he returned to New York.) He also found "Pro Wrestling, rock'n'roll, Christianity, and

probably someday soon, McDonalds." But apparently no designer coffee shops yet. Although Mr. Board describes himself as a good instructor-- and I believe him-- he on several occasions uses incorrect English, always making the same grammatical error: "He wimps out, leaving Sebastian and I stranded" (p. 270) is incorrect. The sentence should read "leaving Sebastian and ME stranded" But you'll find much weirder stuff here. How about half a page of information on Mongolians as "snot-blowers"? Finally you'll read a long time before another travel writer refers to Peter North. (Oops. I'm not supposed to know that he is a famous porn star.) For those of us who will never go to Mongolia, Mr. Board has made a part of the world come alive, reminding us once again that all of us are more alike than we are different. Oh, about the title-- the author says that he wanted something catchy to get the reader's attention-- he is most successful-- but explains that the expression is an old proverb that has little to do with modern Mongolia.

My expectations were not too high but I am surprised. If one is looking for a history of Mongolia -there might be other books that will give you a background of the country and its people-may I suggest going to a library. If you are familiar with his work, one will enjoy this book. His style and stories remind me of "No Reservations and "Weird Foods". He writes candidly about his drinking, eating, and cultural experiences. The best stories are about him meeting the Mongolian metal band "Hurd" and his experiences teaching. Since the book is about his experiences, this book is about how Mykel Board perceives Mongolia. The book is an enjoyable read and will be re-read.

Mykel Board -- punk rocker, New Yorker, gonzo provocateur -- fulfills a lifetime dream by moving to Mongolia for one year to teach English...and I'm so glad he did. His easy-to-read writing style is brutally honest and hysterically funny, from his problems overcoming constipation (because Metamucil is not sold in Outer Mongolia, Board resorts to consuming rancid street food to encourage diarrhea), to his visits to Mongolian dance clubs, to the confusing hurdles presented in this post-Soviet limbo land ("Welcome to Mongolia!" is the standard response from natives when cultural idiosyncracies are brought to attention). Unlike most travel memoirs, there are no overwrought or pretentious analyses of a foreign culture -- even though there were times that I, a fellow traveler, longed for Mykel to take a deeper look at this rarely examined country -- making this book a fun, unrestrained ride through a remote, Kafka-esque kingdom. Buy this book.

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