

ForeWord Reviews

BIOGRAPHY

Traveling Blind: Adventures in Vision with a Guide Dog by My Side

Susan Krieger

Purdue University Press

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Susan Krieger's insightful new memoir, *Traveling Blind*, is a gentle interrogation into the borderlands of sight. Here, readers will find questions often left unasked courageously answered—and many new paths of query opened.

Traveling with a soft, golden companion guide dog named Teela and her longtime human partner, (referred to in the book as) Hannah, Krieger navigates the deserts of the southern United States and, briefly, Mexico, on retreat from her daily routine as a San Francisco academic. Legal blindness, caused in her case by a rare autoimmune disease, presents unique challenges; having some sight, but not being able to rely upon it, is a source of frustration and often—perhaps unexpectedly—wonder.

A vein of delight in light, shape, color, magnitude, and tone runs through Krieger's narrative. The things she does see, even the mundane or tacky, and the ways in which she sees them, are magical and valuable. Here, too, is an appreciation for small kindnesses offered by strangers, and for the patience and love inherent in Hannah's efforts to accommodate not only the physical demands of living with disability, but also the emotional communication and connection needed for both to thrive in their relationship despite different desires, expectations, and experiences. The geographic positioning of her story, and topographical nature of Krieger's daily excursions, highlight the adventure and risk inherent in traveling with unconventional vision.

Studied in ethnographic process and wise to feminist reinterpretations of what it means to really 'know' something, Krieger examines her ever-changing and complicated interactions with the physical world. The “Other” she encounters is often herself, the

person she is becoming as a result of her blindness, or the person she can no longer be—one who can count on her eyes to be reliable guides.

Part of Purdue University Press's series on *New Directions in the Human-Animal Bond*, the book brings to light the mutuality of life with a dog as guide. Krieger reflects on the impact of terrain and public intrusion on Teela, and the ways in which Krieger must try and anticipate the dog's needs even while temporarily forgetting her own. Her bond with Teela complicates and often highlights the boundaries of the writer's own (self)-consciousness: having some sight, and walking with an assistance dog, means that Krieger's blindness is often misunderstood. She is frequently perceived to see better than she actually can. Similarly, people assume she does not rely on the animal for guidance; her analysis of possible reactions she has given in response to the question "Are you training that dog?" is generous in giving space to the assumptions and/or ignorance of others. Moments of frustration and anger are described, though the author seems not to give them as much weight as some might—optimism and positive thinking seem to be her default settings.

Through self-reflection and uncomplicated, interesting travel narrative, *Traveling Blind* offers readers a kind of guidance not unlike a dog might; soft yet firm, specific yet interpretable, and most evidently, fueled by love. (May 2010) *Patty Comeau*

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