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Bestselling novelist David Bergen follows his Scotiabank Giller Prize—winning **The Time in Between** with a haunting novel about the clash of generations — and cultures.

In 1973, outside of Kenora, Ontario, Raymond Seymour, an eighteen-year-old Ojibway boy, is taken by a local policeman to a remote island and left for dead.

A year later, the Byrd family arrives in Kenora. They have come to stay at “the Retreat,” a commune run by the self-styled guru Doctor Amos. The Doctor is an enigmatic man who spouts bewildering truisms, and who bathes naked every morning in the pond at the edge of the Retreat while young Everett Byrd watches from the bushes. Lizzy, the eldest of the Byrd children, cares for her younger brothers Fish and William, and longs for what she cannot find at the Retreat. When Lizzy meets Raymond, everything changes, and Lizzy comes to understand the real difference between Raymond’s world and her own. A tragedy and a love story, the novel moves towards a conclusion that is both astonishing and heartbreaking.

Set during the summer of the Ojibway occupation of Anicinabe Park in Kenora, **The Retreat** is a finely nuanced, deeply felt novel that tells the story of the complicated love between a white girl and a native boy, and of a family on the verge of splintering forever. It is also a story of the bond between two brothers who were separated in childhood, and whose lives and fates intertwine ten years later.

A brilliant portrait of a time and a place, **The Retreat** confirms Bergen’s reputation as one of the country’s most gifted and compelling writers.

The Retreat Details

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From Reader Review The Retreat for online ebook

Chloe says

The interesting thing about this book was that it was not something I would ever have chose to read, as it was something I read for a book report. I had to write an essay afterwards and summarize the story, and so I really became familiar with it. The part I found odd was the fact that many of the characters are sexually attracted to one another - despite their age - and at first this turned me off a bit as unrealistic. As I neared the end of the book, I began to develop a new perspective, and that is - what if this is in fact realistic? There are no glorified lives of the characters; everyone has their own problems they're facing. So overall, I thought this was a worthwhile read.

Pooker says

I had this book on my TBR heap for a long time. I was reluctant to read it in case the author got it all wrong.

Of this author's previous works, I loved The Case of Lena S. I was less enamoured by The Time in Between, but did enjoy it. The stories in Sitting Opposite my Brother were more of a mixed bag for me. Some, especially the last one in the book, I really enjoyed; but many of the others I did not. So, I was a bit concerned that something about this author's work was wearing thin with me. Yet I was aware that The Retreat was set in and around Kenora on Lake of the Woods, the place where I was born and spent most of my childhood (Although I have now spent the majority of my life away from LotW, it is still and always will be "God's country" and home to me.) Further, I knew that the book was set at the time of the occupation of Anicinabe Park, an event that was significant to me at the time it happened and one which has undoubtedly contributed to the formation of my current perspective on aboriginal/non-aboriginal relationships in Canada today. For those reasons I felt compelled to read this book and I really did not want to be disappointed.

---to be continued---

Teri Donovan says

While the writing was ok, the characters were not well developed and the story was all over the place. There really was no clear plot at all. Too bad. I don't think I will bother with anything else he wrote. I prefer a book with an actual story line. This was just one aboriginal boy who was caught up with a white girl, got caught, got (unfairly) punished. Flash-forward a year....he meets another white girl, although this one is not local, she's spending the summer at this "Retreat" with her mentally ill mother, ineffectual father and her three younger brothers. The characters at the Retreat are not well developed nor is there really any clear point to the Retreat. The story takes place in 1973, the summer a group of Ojibway take over a park that is land that was stolen from them by the government of Ontario. There is no clear reason why this was a part of the story.

To sum it up, it's a story mostly about one summer in Kenora ON about a small group of people who meet and interact. No real point to the story and a lot of bits and pieces tossed in apparently at random. I wasted several days on this book.

Monique says

Wow, Bergen gets better and better with each novel. This one is my favourite so far, perhaps because it's set in Kenora, ON, a place I know well. Love, love, loved it.

?Lilbookworm? says

This book was a powerful read. I want more of the characters!

Steven Langdon says

Here is another fine novel focused on First Nations people in Ontario and their relationship with non-aboriginal Canadians -- published in the same year as Joseph Boyden's Giller Prize winning "Through Black Spruce." While the framework for Boyden's book is wide and quite diverse, the context here is much more intimate -- the forests and lakes around Kenora, where Raymond Seymour is trying to find himself amidst a threatened Indian culture, the crude and sometimes cruel racism of the local white community and a tentatively loving relationship with Lizzy Byrd, a quietly rebellious girl whose insights and passions come to crystallize the book. Lizzy's efforts to build a loyalty that contrasts with her mother's manic selfishness collide with bitter realities, in a beautifully written story of a harsh time and place.

David Bergen has given us haunting tales in the past, including ""The Time in Between,"" awarded a previous Giller prize. But the writing in this novel has reached a level of strong, hard, straightforward clarity that is matchless. Some of the characters in this novel could have been developed more, such as Lizzy's father, Lewis, and Raymond's grandmother. But that is a minor limitation in a major achievement.

Janice says

This story will stay with me for some time. It's so powerful.

It's essentially about a young girl's relationship with Raymond, an Indigenous boy who has had a shit life due to being treated like crap by entitled white people. It is the story of our time but stretches back to the time before, when young children were taken away in the 60's scoop to be raised by complete strangers. This story is haunting in its brutal honesty. Read it.

Janet says

Suprisingly, this was a difficult book for me to finish. It is a very slow moving story, set in the 1970's in Kenora, Ontario. As one Goodreads reader aptly said "What disappointed me was that there was a lot of waiting between events and I felt that I had spent my whole summer at this Retreat by the time I ended the

novel." But I think that was Bergen's point whose novels are often about the very ordinaryness of life. The Retreat is about the Ojibwe's occupation of Anicinabe Park, a romance between a 17 year old white girl and an Ojibway boy, and a bunch of adults who are dissatisfied with life and seeking answers at a commune-style psychiatric retreat (well it is set in the '70s). I wouldn't offer this up as a first read of David Bergen - but it is as always very well written.

Kristy Trauzzi says

This book was good. Very good.

It was such a nice change to have a Canadian book where as I was reading I was like "Oh I've been there!" "Oh yes! I know what you're talking about!" Very neat.

The treatment of Raymond was appalling. Mistreatment of people by police happens way too frequently. They are supposed to be the good guys. And so much of their crimes seem to be against a minority - or since I'm personally changing my view of what the minority is - a person of color. There is no reason for that. It makes me ill.

The relationship between Raymond and Nelson was weird. I find it so weird that Nelson got taken away and Raymond didn't? I was a little unclear as to who took Nelson away - but whatever the reason, you would think they would want both of them. That they just so easily walked away and never came back when one child was gone. And Nelson's semi - gay feelings that poked through . . . Was that in some way connected to him being taken away? A form of acting out? Cuz sometimes it seemed to me that he was not totally into everything. But then at some points I got that he really was into boys and cross dressing - but then felt judged and backed down? And then with Everett. . . . It was interesting and I don't have a solid view on that issue.

The Retreat itself sucked. I was in no way into the story of the other characters at the Retreat. I don't think that was planned as they did spend some time going into the characters that were there. It wasn't as if the author just used the Retreat so that Lizzy could meet Raymond. Maybe because it was a secondary plot he didn't really care that they weren't the greatest story. Not every author can make the background characters interesting as well.

Overall, good. I enjoyed it.

Tiffany says

I appreciated this book but I didn't necessarily like it. Let me explain.

David Bergen is a master of nuance. There are a lot of things happening alongside one another: the Ojibway occupation of Anicinabe Park, Lizzy's coming of age, the Byrd family's disintegration, Raymond and Lizzy's blossoming relationship, a mother's selfishness, Everett's sexual awakening, infidelity, cult mentality, police

brutality, racial discrimination, and sad humans all searching for something just beyond their grasp. *The Retreat* is jam-packed with rich content, all of which mingles well within itself. Deeper within that, layers of nuance emerge to add even more intricacy to the novel, and these layers are so thin you're not even sure you've caught on until the undertone repeats itself later in the narrative. For example, almost all the characters have slight incestuous feelings at some point, whether they emerge in dreams or subconscious associations revealed only to the reader. Nuances like this are scattered throughout the novel, and I was amazed at Bergen's ability to keep all events happening concurrently in addition to maintaining smooth between-the-lines kind of writing.

Despite all this mastery, however, I STILL couldn't like the story. It was beautifully executed but it wasn't compelling. Most of the characters seemed to be standing around waiting for something to happen to them rather than causing the novel's action. Raymond seemed especially passive, letting that asshole cop dump him on an island for nine days, although I can understand this as a device to demonstrate racial oppression. Lizzy let her mother treat her like a nanny, Lewis doesn't seem to care when his wife admits her infidelity, and Harris is just a useless lump who's accepted that his wife has taken a live-in lover. While important, these elements (and others) did nothing to pique my interest in the plot.

I'd like to give this novel a 3.5, and I still consider it a Canadian gem of a book. The fine artistry is definitely there, but that didn't stop *The Retreat* from being a bit of a slog at times.

Charles says

A beautifully written & compelling book that tells a story in Kenora ,Ontario interweaving the sad circumstances of Raymond Seymour a young Indian man who is abandoned to die on an island on Lake of the Woods when he won't stop his affair with a young white girl, the niece of the local cop. He is rescued after a week by a passing boat, One year later the dysfunctional Byrd family-a depressed mother Norma, ineffectual father Lewis, a 17 yr old girl Lizzie & her 3 younger brothers come to "the Retreat"run by a self-serving ex-chiropractor & cult figure, where the mother hopes to find salvation. Raymond supplies the place with chickens & rabbits, works at a golf course in grounds maintenance & lives in a small cabin in the woods. A love affair develops between Ray & Lizzy, and Nelson Ray's older brother who had been forcibly given to a white family as a child returns after 10 years. This occurs at the time of the Anicinabe standoff between Indians & the white community in which Ray becomes involved. Norma abandons her family, while Ray & Nelson involved in a tussle with the policeman, accidentally knife him. He survives & they attempt to flee but later Ray will get shot by the cop & die & Nelson will end up in jail. The writing is atmospheric & charged &holds the reader's attention throughout.

Liz says

I loved the intersecting storylines of such wonderful, compelling characters. I admire this novel for two key reasons. The first is that it tackles a number of topical issues without ever seeming preachy. The novel is about the characters themselves experiencing the issues, not a lesson in how the reader should react to them. My second reason for admiring this novel is the character of Lizzy. What a complex character, written to perfection by Bergen - wise beyond her years, yet making naïve, ill-informed choices typical for a girl experiencing her first love.

My one minor complaint about this novel is that all the members of the Byrd family got their own full storyline, except for William. His story felt like it ended abruptly and I really wanted to see more from his perspective.

Reading 'The Retreat' was such a pleasure. I am excited to see what else Bergen has to offer.

Ineke van Mackelenbergh says

I most certainly appreciated the author's writing style - clear and spare prose creating good atmosphere and succinctly portraying interrelationships within a somewhat dysfunctional family and between other characters in the book; the often narrated dialogue doesn't distract but adds to the nuances - and for that I stuck with it.

However, after a really good and tense start it all went on a bit and I felt I was slogging through two different storylines juxtaposing the White Canadian way of life (in the 1970's) against the plight of the the native First Nations in Kenora, different cultures and within that generation gaps - sensitively done.

That said, two earlier reviews [by Shane and Tiffany] coincide much with my own views, a.o. "beautifully executed but not compelling" [sic].

My first book by "one of Canada's best writers" (Montreal Gazette) and captivated by David Bergen's writing style, I will certainly look out for another one....

Shane says

There are two distinct story lines here and I wondered if they would have been more powerful if developed as two separate novels. In keeping with the title of the novel, we are introduced to seventeen year old Lizzy and her family and their stay at the Retreat for her mother's "rehabilitation." Weaving through is a more interesting story of two Native Indian brothers fighting for survival and validation in a white man's world, and failing.

Based around an event when the Ojibway occupied the Anicinabe Park in Kenora, we get to spend the summer of 1974 at the Retreat with the Byrd family: Lizzy, the doer and surrogate mother to her younger siblings, her fourteen year old brother Everett grappling with his blossoming sexuality that could tip him in either direction orientation-wise, Mrs. Byrd, the absentee mother, who is constantly looking to discover herself even if it means having trysts with the Retreat's self-styled guru Dr Amos, Mr. Byrd who thinks the Retreat is a big joke but will do anything to keep his wife and family intact, and four-year old Fish, the youngest child, who likes to wander off and get lost and bring the family face-to-face with its deepest fissures. Surrounding the Byrds is a motley cast of visitors, permanent and transitory, to the Retreat, seeking wisdom from the enigmatic doctor on how to cope in the real world. There is even a crippled writer, Harris, who befriends the children, whose wife is making out with another guest while he likens himself to "a dull moth banging at an unlit lantern."

On the other side of the spectrum is Raymond, the eighteen year old Ojibway boy who likes white girls and constantly gets into trouble with prejudiced law enforcement officers as a result of this fatal attraction. Raymond snags his girls by being indifferent and remote, partly due to his fear of being arrested, but that cocktail is irresistible to his more privileged girlfriends from the other side of the tracks. His brother Nelson

is more outgoing, but as he was once taken away from home and adopted by a white family, Nelson is more cynical about the plight of the Native Indian. Both are likely candidates to be drawn into the Ojibway occupation of the park that is to follow before the summer ends.

Viewed from the perspectives of the children, we see that the adults are all screwed up and are poor role models for their progeny. As Lizzy observes, “most adults wanted what they couldn’t or didn’t have, and they would hurt people to get it.” Yet the sexuality is downplayed while the sensuality is notched up – there is a lot of touching and smelling going on, especially among the young ones.

I found the style distinct: sparse prose, pronouns dropped, dialogue “told” or narrated, and sentences ending on prepositions (the English teacher’s nightmare!)

What disappointed me was that there was a lot of waiting between events and I felt that I had spent my whole summer at this Retreat by the time I ended the novel. There are missed opportunities for drama between Raymond and the cops, when Fish goes “walkabout,” and when Lizzie wanders around in the woods or in town on her own, but they are all downplayed, resolved quickly or ignored. I wonder if that is something about writing a Canadian literary novel and preferring bland. And despite the major portion of the book being dedicated to the inhabitants at the Retreat and to Lizzy’s coming of age, the novel ends with a more tense sequence of events involving Raymond and Nelson. I guess, after all the waiting, some tension was called for, but in the presentation it felt like two different stories were trying to cohabit within the same book, almost like the Indian boy and his white girlfriend trying to find a life together and failing. In that sense, I wondered whether *The Retreat* was a misnomer and if *Two Different Worlds* may have been more apt?

Wendy says

This was my second read of "The Retreat" and I probably enjoyed it more the second time although that could be because I'm a big fan of David Bergen. He's definitely one of Canada's top authors and each novel is so different.

There are a lot of things happening in this novel: the Ojibway occupation of Anicinabe Park outside of Kenora in the 70's, a teenager's coming of age and her blossoming relationship with a local boy, a family's disintegration, a mother's selfishness, a young boy's sexual awakening, infidelity, cult mentality, police brutality, racial discrimination, and more.

I usually don't care for novels that have several narrators but it worked in the Retreat. I felt like I knew what it would feel like to be a teenager and dragged from my home in Calgary to a rural commune outside of Kenora for the summer.

Sadly the Ojibway occupation of the park took place in the 70's but I feel that not much has changed.
