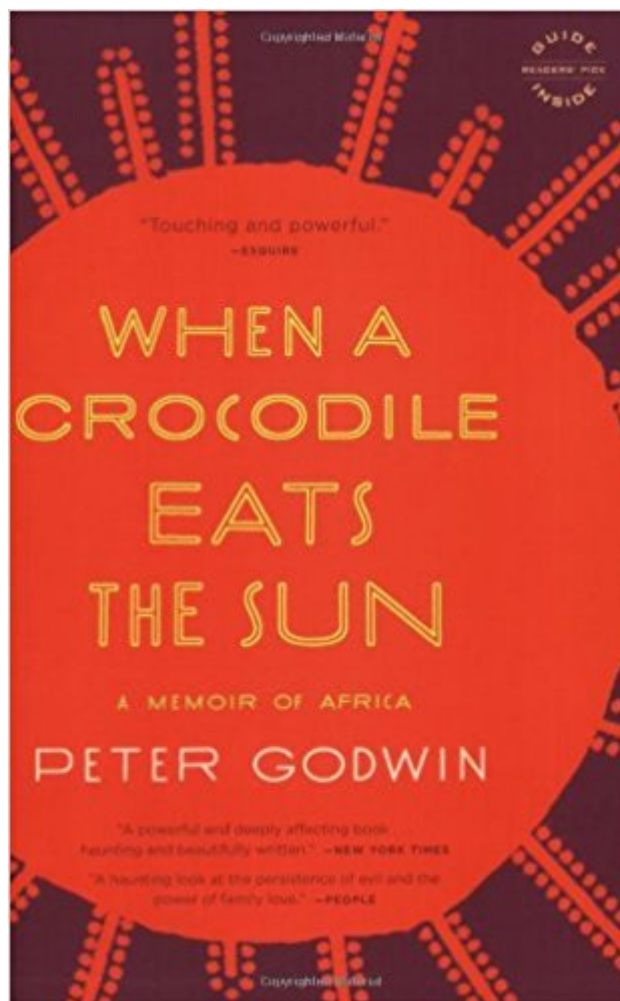


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When A Crocodile Eats The Sun: A Memoir Of Africa



Synopsis

Hailed by reviewers as "powerful," "haunting" and "a tour de force of personal journalism," *When A Crocodile Eats the Sun* is the unforgettable story of one man's struggle to discover his past and come to terms with his present. Award winning author and journalist Peter Godwin writes with pathos and intimacy about Zimbabwe's spiral into chaos and, along with it, his family's steady collapse. This dramatic memoir is a searing portrait of unspeakable tragedy and exile, but it is also vivid proof of the profound strength of the human spirit and the enduring power of love. "In the tradition of Rian Malan and Philip Gourevitch, a deeply moving book about the unknowability of an Africa at once thrilling and grotesque. In elegant, elegiac prose, Godwin describes his father's illness and death in Zimbabwe against the backdrop of Mugabe's descent into tyranny. His parent's waning and the country's deterioration are entwined so that personal and political tragedy become inseparable, each more profound for the presence of the other" -- Andrew Solomon, author of *The Noonday Demon* "A fascinating, heartbreaking, deeply illuminating memoir that has the shape and feel of a superb novel." -Kurt Anderson, author of *Heyday*

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this exquisitely written, deeply moving account of the death of a father played out against the backdrop of the collapse of the southern African nation of Zimbabwe, seasoned journalist Godwin has produced a memoir that effortlessly manages to be almost unbearably personal while simultaneously laying bare the cruel regime of longstanding president Robert

Mugabe. In 1996 when his father suffers a heart attack, Godwin returns to Africa and sparks the central revelation of the book – the father is Jewish and has hidden it from Godwin and his siblings. As his father's health deteriorates, so does Zimbabwe. Mugabe, self-proclaimed president for life, institutes a series of ill-conceived land reforms that throw the white farmers off the land they've cultivated for generations and consequently throws the country's economy into free fall. There's sadness throughout – for the death of the father, for the suffering of everyone in Zimbabwe (black and white alike) and for the way that human beings invariably treat each other with casual disregard. Godwin's narrative flows seamlessly across the decades, creating a searing portrait of a family and a nation collectively coming to terms with death. This is a tour de force of personal journalism and not to be missed. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Godwin, the author of a previous memoir about growing up during Zimbabwe's war of independence, has written a sequel of sorts, tracing the collapse of his country in the course of the past decade (the violently destructive Robert Mugabe is the "crocodile" of the title) in tandem with the decline of his father. The memoir's central drama comes from the dying father's revelation that he is not British at all, as his son had always believed, but a Polish Jew, born Kazimierz Jerzy Goldfarb, whose mother and sister were killed in Treblinka. Occasionally, Godwin's attempts to knit the various story lines together seem a bit pat; "A white in Africa is like a Jew everywhere . . . waiting for the next great tidal swell of hostility"; but he ultimately delivers a powerful narrative of grief and desperation, both personal and national. Copyright © 2007 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I'm not sure how to rate this book. It appeared to me at once a biographical about the depressing early years of an independent Zimbabwe; on the other hand, it devolved into a most personal autobiography. I am torn. I lived in Rhodesia from 1962 through 1969 with a year in Zambia sandwiched in between. I was not raised in Rhodesia but did spend nearly six of my formative years in Tanganyika. Before moving to Rhodesia as a young man I did a six months' stint in Blantyre, Malawi, staying at Ryalls Hotel (not Riley's as misprinted,) and have mixed feelings. From a literary perspective, Godwin's writing style is creative, exotic and stimulating although the most stimulating part, which tends

negative, was a bit much for me having lived in the country in happier times. Coming events however, were indeed casting their shadows before them in the 60s. So, I harbor little doubt that the impression he leaves is accurate. I made a flying visit to Harare, (Salisbury) in 1985 and saw the downhill trend with my own eyes. A former Shona servant of mine whom I contacted bemoaned the terrible situation and avowed how much better life had been under white rule. And Mugabe was just getting started. If you knew Rhodesia, reading this book will leave you impressed and distressed. If you didn't, you may regard the story with a more objective eye although it's hard to believe anyone could be objective about this international disgrace. Well worth the read if you can handle it.

The Slope of Kongwa Hill: A Boy's Tale of Africa

"When a Crocodile Eats the Sun" is a magnificent memoir. It is, in my mind, the best book I have read for some years. At varying times, it can be tragic, uplifting, sad and captivating. I simply devoured it over a handful of days. Peter Godwin was born in Rhodesia, a country to which his parents emigrated after the Second World War. His mother was a doctor and his father an engineer. They were seeking a fresh start in Africa. Their hopes would have been boundless. Godwin's memoir covers the period from 1996 until 2004. It is a period in which his father's health is progressively declining and ultimately leads to his death. This decline is a metaphor for the tragedy that is modern Zimbabwe. From having been part of the nation's educated elite, Godwin's family is slowly reduced to penury. The nation is ruled by an authoritarian kleptocrat, Robert Mugabe. Single handedly, this man has run Zimbabwe down from a relatively prosperous nation with good prospects to being a beggar. One can only hope that history treats this man with the contempt that is his due. Godwin tells the story of the nation's decline through the eyes of a foreigner who now only visits the country periodically. He has moved to New York where he is a writer. On each trip home he sees a nation one step closer to anarchy. This in itself is a sad tale but when seen against the backdrop of his own father's failing health, the tale is especially tragic. Intertwined with the larger picture is a slowly revealing portrait of his father's background which had been kept secret from his children. This too is a sad story. Some people are truly dogged by the misfortunes of when and where they were born. This is certainly true for Godwin senior. I will say no more. Arguably, I have revealed too much already. However, I do thoroughly recommend this book. It is a masterpiece of compelling literature.

Peter Godwin's book - When A Crocodile Eats the Sun is a book many can equate to as many of us from Southern Africa have struggled to discover our own

past whatever our persuasion. I for one was born in Southern Africa, lived in the CAF (Central African Federation) - Federation of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland now (Malawi) and have witnessed the "Wind of Change" that swept through Africa and in many ways still is. No matter what side of the equation one sits, to read Peter Godwin's book "When A Crocodile Eats the Sun" clearly puts things into perspective, as one may recall one's own very similar experiences shedding a genuine tear of grief whilst others may weep crocodile tears.

In "When A Crocodile Eats The Sun", Peter Godwin shares an intimate and deeply personal account of Zimbabwe's societal and economic collapse under Mugabe's rule. In episodes of varying length and separation, we glimpse Zimbabwe's decline through Godwin's visits home, where everyday life gradually becomes a struggle for his family and friends. In handling matters both mundane and profound, this memoir reads as a sincere telling of this melancholy chapter in history. The decline and eventual death of Godwin's father is the painful personal narrative that parallels the death of the nation he once knew. The frustration and futility of the author's experiences are all the more poignant for the private moments shared with the reader.

A great read about important events and times. A really enlightening tale which examined generally known happenings in a very detailed and shocking context. The human factors in the story were so very well done and the sense of dismay and waste palpable. Not only was the history of racial conflict and colonisation done well but also the analysis of the effects upon and reactions of, the protagonists was outstanding and set many aspects into a widely universal experience of endurance, suffering, loyalty and resistance to the point of ultimate loss.

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