



Could You Be Startin' From Somewhere Else?: Sketches From Buffalo And Beyond

Michael W. Shurgot

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Like all memoirs, Michael W. Shurgot's "Could You Be Startin' From Somewhere Else? Sketches from Buffalo and Beyond"--is a kaleidoscopic mixture of memory and history. The title is the punch line from an Irish joke the author's mother told every St. Patrick's Day. The obvious answer to the question is "No"; no one can start from somewhere else. With this as his premise, Shurgot explores his early years growing up in a middle-class, multi-ethnic neighborhood in Buffalo, NY from the late 1940s to the early 1960s to find the roots of his adult life. The book evokes an era and a culture in post World War II America that, while vastly different from our own, is, as the author shows, worthy of remembrance. These "sketches" evoke fond memories of the author's childhood: an exuberant, witty Irish mother; a reserved, quiet Ukrainian father; often turbulent relations between siblings and parents in an era of prescribed parenting roles in traditional families; and the enduring love that kept this family intact during economic hardships and personal difficulties. Individual chapters explore the author's courageous efforts to deliver a morning paper in cold, snowy Buffalo; his humorous, valiant, yet finally pathetic efforts to follow in his father's athletic footsteps, especially as a baseball player; his early encounter and later struggles with faith and organized religion; the "cruisin'" car culture of the early 1960s; the demanding Jesuit educational system that propelled him into an academic career; and reflections on his own role as husband and parent. Finally, this memoir evokes "home," a word that, as A. Bartlett Giamatti explains, is especially poignant in a land of immigrants, all of whom left one home to find another. Giamatti writes that home is "a state of mind where self-examination starts; it is origins--the mix of time and place and smell and weather wherein one first realizes that one is an original, perhaps like others, especially those one loves, but discrete, distinct, not to be copied." Like the baseball player who aims to return home after his journey around the bases, in this poignant memoir the author travels back home to celebrate his roots and to find the unique person he has become.

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