



He Was There All the Time

Nick Hoffman

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In this volume, a veteran newspaperman tells his life story through many years' worth of columns.

In 1984, Nick Hoffman joined the *Courier-Express* newspaper in DuBois, a town of around 7,500 in west central Pennsylvania. For the next 30 years, he wrote hundreds of columns on many topics, some of which recounted stories from his own life.

That life is the subject of *He Was There All the Time*. The book reprints many of those columns, which Hoffman has fleshed out with backstories, codas, and other details, from the perspective of an older person looking back.

The columns were bits of local news—a high school teacher's retirement, the town pharmacist's death—which, in their original publication, Hoffman turned into meditations, now repurposed into brief nostalgic flavor bombs. He recalled, for example, "Grammy Bak's and Pop Bill's home on Broad Street in Brockway," where "I watched a lot of the Watergate hearings" and learned to ride a bike: "I was so overwhelmed at figuring out how to pedal that I forgot to steer—and wiped out a sizable chunk of Grammy Bak's peony plants."

Readers of a certain age will immediately access their own similar memories, allowing themselves to be swept along in the agreeable stream of the past. Hoffman is a natural storyteller, and there's always a market for richly-told memoirs. His book is a pleasant diversion overall.

Hoffman occasionally references his Christian beliefs throughout these narratives. These moments are seamlessly woven into what is largely a straightforward tale of small-town Americana. Unfortunately, he risks alienating readers with a preface and epilogue that announce a more evangelical agenda. "Maybe you are looking but haven't found Him," Hoffman writes at book's end. "That's OK. Take comfort in knowing that He's looking for you... He's ready; are you?" Some readers will find these pronouncements jarring and offputting.

Proselytizing aside, readers seeking a nostalgic trip back in time will find much to enjoy in Hoffman's well-told tales.

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