

'I've Been Reading...'

Magnificent Desolation: The Long Journey Home from the Moon, by Buzz Aldrin and Ken Abraham, New York: Harmony, 2009.



By John Halford

I have always found the story of the moon landing fascinating, so I was looking forward to reading this account by Buzz Aldrin, the second man to set foot on the lunar surface. It was not quite what I expected.

Aldrin is famous for his 'magnificent desolation' description of the lunar landscape. But the focus of this book is not about his epic adventure 40 years ago. He gets that out of the way in the first few chapters. He then tells the story of the not-so-magnificent desolation his life became in the decade following the moon landing.

In a remarkably frank account he describes how, after reaching the heights of fame and acclaim as a genuine American hero, he allowed

himself to become a drunken derailed. In his own words:

I...achieved the greatest success, universally acclaimed as one of mankind's most extraordinary achievements to date, and then found adversity crouching at my door, waiting to trip me up. Once entangled, I didn't unwittingly fall into depression and alcoholism; I took willful steps in the wrong direction, thinking I could turn around at any point. But like a motorboat idling on the Niagara River, I soon found myself being swept along, past the point of no return, out of control, drowning my sorrows and disappointments in alcohol, and heading for the precipice and ultimate destruction. Having been to the moon, I plummeted into my own personal hell on Earth. Had it not been for some friends who cared enough

to call a drunk a drunk, even if he had walked on the moon, I might have perished.¹

Aldrin describes his collapse honestly and candidly. It is a compelling story, and I found myself caught up in his struggle, and wanting him to succeed. Eventually he does:

Finally, in October 1978, I laid down alcohol once and for all. My willingness to do so was not an act of willpower so much as a coming to the end of my own selfishness. I had always been self-centred, and because of my abilities or my intelligence or my fame, people had let me get away with it. When I began to see myself for what I really was, and had a group of fellow travellers who knew me for what I was—and were not impressed—I began to take baby steps toward getting well. Along the way, I learned that to truly keep something and hold onto it, you have to give it away.²

What I thought would be a book about outer space is more a story of the conquest of inner space, and I recommend it to anyone who is interested in personal growth and development. If you are struggling with an addiction or depression, you may find it particularly reassuring. Buzz Aldrin shows how anyone—even a genuine hero—can become a victim. But with courage, humility and the right support, you can face up to your problem, and change.

Notes

¹ *Magnificent Desolation*, pp. 305-306.

² *ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

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