

Book Review

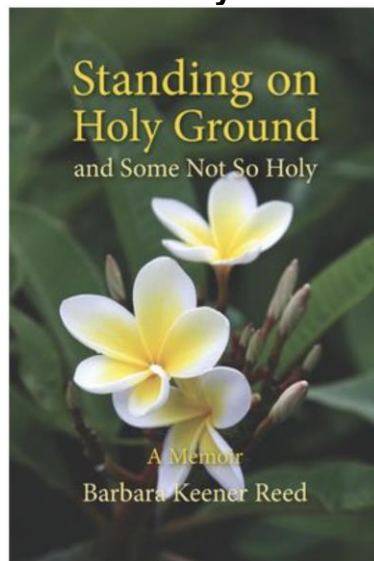
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Reed, Barbara Keener. *Standing on Holy Ground ò and Some Not so Holy: A Memoir*. Lancaster: Pennsylvania. Self-published, 2021. 294 pages. ISBN 978-1-60126-781-8. [Paper back on Amazon: USD 15](#).

Brief Introduction

Barbara Keener Reed (b. 1935), a missionary to Somalia, graduated from the Lancaster General Hospital School of Nursing, since renamed Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences. She later earned a certification in psychiatric and mental health nursing and also studied chaplaincy, family therapy and practice, marital and premarital counselling and poetry.

Brief Summary



Standing on Holy Ground ò and Some Not so Holy is an informative memoir about a courageous Christian couple, the author and her late husband, Harold, and their four children who made their home in Somalia, one of the most challenging countries for a Westerner to live in. While the Reeds helped many Somalis and others in East Africa with education, healthcare and income generating projects, the author states the goal for writing this memoir with a classic Mennonite humility, *Although we may not be remembered for illustrious deeds, I do not want Harold ò and my òbrary ò pass into oblivion when I follow him to meet my Maker. ò* Here the author alludes to the African proverb, that when an old person dies, a library burns down.

The Reeds departed for Somalia with two children on 10 October 1961 and embarked on outstanding mission work in Islamic Somalia with Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (EMBMC).² They later ministered in other countries in Africa, Europe, and in the USA. The author, a farmer ò daughter, proved to be a gentle leader and support while Harold, who

¹ Page 1.

² EMBMC, now known as Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), 450 N. Prince St. Lancaster, PA 17603.

studied theology and education, was a versatile administrator and was also proficient in the trades.

Ministry in Somalia was not a smooth ride. The government had become upset when a few Somali Christians distributed Christian literature in front of a mosque in the capital, and though the government eventually reversed the decision, it directed the Somali Mennonite Mission (SMM) to cease all work in 1962. 14 years later, the government officially and permanently closed the mission, having already nationalized all mission property some time before. During their time in Somalia, the Reeds lost family members back home and one Canadian co-worker in Mogadishu who was stabbed to death. Harold faced a death threat and the author was almost electrocuted when an old washing machine malfunctioned, and she received a strong electric shock.

Analysis

Standing on Holy Ground ò and Some Not so Holy is the life story of a veteran missionary couple and their four children ñboth of their missionary days as well as life thereafter. Harold, an educator, and the author, a nurse, served in Somalia over a 14 year period and eventually transitioned to other world areas to continue their ministry. While the author served as a missionary, she also taught English and sewing. In the early years of her ministry, the author wondered how she qualified to serve in cross cultural settings considering herself òOnly a female, only a farmer ò daughter, only a Mennonite. òThis mental script held her back for many years until she eventually broke free to exercise her God given talent.

Some of the life-threatening challenges the author faced in Somalia include receiving a near-fatal electric shock. She became unconscious and unresponsive, received CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and recovered from the near-electrocution. The author also experienced an unexpected loss in July 1963 while in Somalia, when both of her parents were killed in a car accident. Another unfortunate incident was when one of Harold ò students threatened him with physical harm. The threat by this troubled student came shortly after Merlin Grove, a co-missionary with the Reeds, was stabbed to death in Mogadishu and his wife critically injured. The student visited Harold at home and said, òò make your family a widow and orphans! ò³ but later apologized to Harold and became a follower of Christ.

The Reeds ò commitment to serve the Somali people was deep rooted that even the 1969 military coup could not shake their resolve. The Reeds were in the US for furlough when the 21 October revolution took place, but they still decided to return to Somalia with their children despite the counsel of friends and family who advised them not to go back. When an acquaintance whose husband served in Somalia with the State Department strongly advised the author not to return the children to Somalia, she still kept her plan to return with the children; òthere was no other

³ Page 82.

plan. ⁶ The Reeds once again demonstrated their courage and conviction that the safest place for them and the children was where God wanted them to be.

The Reeds were not allowed to openly preach the gospel in Islamic Somalia but living a Christ-like life could not be censored. The Reeds entertained guests, practiced hospitality and sacrificially served the Somali people. They quickly won the hearts and the minds of the Somali people who acknowledged them as deeply religious people who lived a godly life. The author recognizes that some Muslims live exemplary lives and is impressed by their emphasis on submission to God and their disciplined fasting, when they annually fast from food and drink from sunrise to sunset for thirty continuous days.⁵ The Reeds and Somalis honored each other; a mutual honoring which opened the door for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The author states ⁶When we were resident in Somalia, women were much slower to inquire about matters of faith and to consider the invitation of Christ. Being fewer in number among the Christian believers was an obstacle for establishing Christian homes. ⁷ The author also acknowledges that it takes a longer time for Muslims to follow Jesus, as they take longer to count the cost. She also gives examples of violent persecutions, including martyrdom, which some local Christians faced in the hands of Muslims. One of the reasons fewer Muslim women follow the Lord in Somalia could be that they cannot tolerate or evade persecution as the men can more easily do.

When the Somali government nationalized the Somali Mennonite Mission (SMM) properties in 1973, Harold and a lay leader approached a Roman Catholic Father in Mogadishu asking him if he could allow them to use the Catholic Cathedral for services. The Father made available to them a space they could freely worship. This is another example of the Reeds ⁸reaching out to others and their gift in interpersonal relationships. Eventually, the Somali government asked the Reeds to leave Somalia in November 1974. The author writes, ⁹Even now after almost a half century later as I consider the event of our departure, I am moved to tears. *Such is the grip, the impact that Somalis and Somalia had ñand have ñon us.* ¹⁰ The Reed ¹¹ hearts will forever beat for Somalia and her people. ¹²

While *Standing on Holy Ground* ¹³ and *Some Not so Holy* was published in 2021, decades into the 21st century, traces of mid 20th century worldview are visible, such as when the author describes a popular guest house in Nairobi as ¹⁴popular among

⁴ Page 117.

⁵ Page 111.

⁶ Page 112.

⁷ Page 163.

⁸ Page 166.

African [church leaders] and missionaries of varied denominations and nationalities. The problem with this perception is that there are in fact African missionaries in Kenya and in many other countries in Africa, a continent of 54 sovereign states. The author also states that the Somali regions of Somaliland and Puntland seceded from the republic but have not been granted recognition by the international community. While it is accurate that Somaliland declared its secession from Somalia in 1991, Puntland never claimed any secession and remains firmly in the Republic of Somalia.

Harold was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2008, and after extended care passed away in 2017 at age 83.

Conclusion

Standing on Holy Ground and Some Not so Holy is a beautifully written book which is beneficial to anyone interested in missions, Islamic ministry, cross-cultural studies and anthropology. This is a must-read book, not only for those interested in the Somali people but for anyone with a global world view. This book achieves its stated goal and Harold and Barbara's library will not pass into oblivion when her earthly time comes to an end.

While the Reeds experienced many challenges and blessings during the course of their marriage and ministry, one of the most touching parts is how the author served her husband from the day he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and until the day he died. The author's dedication to her ailing husband who lost his memory and speaking ability is the most commendable thing a spouse could do for their ailing partner. The author's Christian faith was the guiding light for the sacrificial love she bestowed upon her husband at the time he needed her the most.

The book narrates in a cohesive manner the upbringing of the Reeds, their education, children and career as missionaries who ministered in several countries in three different continents. It is without a doubt that the Reeds' Mennonite heritage contributed to their ministry success in countries of different cultures. The Reeds' integrity and work ethic, a classic Mennonite tradition, appealed to so many local people in each country they served in.

⁹ Page 167.

¹⁰ Pages 191-192.