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And The Monkey Lets Go: Memoirs Through Illusion and Doubt  
by Scott Hunter Mascot Books

I did not always know whether to laugh or cry while reading this well written, humorous, and sad book about addiction and recovery. Sometimes it seems neither did Mr Hunter but then just when I thought his lack of self awareness undermines his writing, he presented a short and powerful insight that proved he really was in command of this narrative. Sentences like "...I never question my need for drugs and alcohol. Addicts never do. They can't. Blocking emotions is too important," made me anxious to read on.

Though metaphorically lost in the wilderness for many years trusting only in drugs and alcohol to make life bearable, Hunter has however many compelling stories to tell. He writes vividly of his wanderling in and out of some very interesting places, jobs, and alternative communities. Among them is teaching English in a rural Thai village as an alternative to military service during the Vietnam War, a job as an aid at Belchertown State Hospital in Massachusetts when the developmentally disabled were treated as throw away people, and a few years living in a teepee (think New England winters), in a live-in community that function as a collective. In spite of the ongoing cocoon of drugs and alcohol and some near disasters, Hunter is able to make some significant contributions to the wellbeing of those with whom he is working. Both his creative problem solving abilities and his compassion really come to life. Some of these chapters serve as a reminder that just as a person with a severe mental illness is always a lot more than his or hers mental illness, a person who seems buried by an addiction can still be much more than his or her addiction.

The reader also journeys with Hunter through two stints at Christian seminaries. His motivations are not of the celestial kind and he relishes taking on his instructors and their beliefs. There is a 'gotcha' quality to many of these interactions with seemingly some ego on Hunter's part. Nevertheless, these chapters are humorous and there is a lively energy to them. Simultaneously, there are moments he demonstrates just how destructive excessive drugs and alcohol are to his judgement.

His doomed search for intimacy is another theme for this memoir. None of this is humorous. He makes it clear how much he wants a sense of belonging, acceptance from others, and sexual intimacy with a woman. There are fleeting moments when all of those things seem at hand but his own fears of being seen and what he frequently refers to as crippling guilt render them all unattainable. He always bolts and runs to the arms of the comforting oblivion of drugs and booze. Onto the next adventure/next escape.

Then after at least two decades of drugs and alcohol serving as his main companion something changes. What leads to this fundamental turning point is not so clearly explained. It is however clearly demonstrated. With the help of friends, some serendipity, lots of help from

AA, and a steel-like determination Hunter ceases taking drugs and alcohol. This is a remarkable part of the story. He just stops - full stop. One day he is an active addict and the next day he is not, nor is he ever again. It then becomes clear what discipline this man has. Some of this shows up earlier in the story but not to this degree. He constructs a new life, a new business, becomes an ultra runner, and enters a lasting relationship. He does not of course do this alone as no one does, but he does do it and goes on to live a very different life.

Sometimes as a reader I found it difficult to stick with Mr Hunter through the extended fog of his addictions and his ability to pull defeat out of success. However, the transformation he achieves, the humour he brings to a decidedly painful portion of his life, his storytelling ability, and his capacity to bring to life some aspects of cultural, political, and social movements that are a backdrop to his memoir made this book well worth reading. Most of all it provides hope for millions of people who need to believe in hope.