



Soldier's Son (Willie Morris Book in Memoir and Biography)

Ben W. McClelland

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In December 1944 First Lieutenant Ewing R. "Pete" McClelland was captured in the Battle of the Bulge. Soon afterwards in an Allied air attack on the German POW camp where he was held, he was killed.

Back home in Pennsylvania, his young widow and three small children survived him. Too young to have lasting recollections, Ben W. McClelland, the soldier's son who was just beyond infancy, became one of the war's fatherless innocents for whom the memories of others would form the paternal image.

As the boy evolved into manhood, he reflected on how strange it was to grow up without this parent. In this narrative, a work of analysis as well as an odyssey into family heritage, the son undertakes a compelling search to find this man he could not remember. Through sentiment and nostalgia he depicts the innocence of childhood and recalls the many people who furnished impressions of his father.

Old photographs, intimate letters, and interviews with the memory keepers and the storytellers in his extended family were resources from which the author recreated a time and a place and a person. This reconstruction resurrects a father vital in life and passion, a man chronicled in humorous family tales, realized among vivid small-town characters, and seen against the contrast of social changes of the 1960s.

The search for his father consumed most of a lifetime. As Ben W. McClelland was approaching the age of sixty, he had recovered this lost, never-before-realized identity. But to complete the circle of his quest, he undertook one thing more, the emotional pilgrimage to his father's grave in Europe.

Although many other memoirs detail the experience of the soldier on the fronts of battle, this one brings an understanding of his sacrifice in wartime, of the resounding meaning of his death for his country and for his family, and of a son's profound yearning for answers that fulfill.

Ben W. McClelland is a professor of English and holder of the Schillig Chair of English Composition at the University of Mississippi.

Check the author's website.

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