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While I Was Learning to Become God

Roxana Jones

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Reviewed by Vicki Landes for Reader Views (6/11)

“While I Was Learning to Become God” is an autobiographical account of Columbian Sybil Vaughan’s life, as dictated to author Roxana Jones. Vaughan, already on her deathbed, recounts her life to Jones so that others may learn of her extraordinary experiences. These experiences range from ‘normal’ to tragic to even difficult to believe.

Vaughan begins life on the small Caribbean island of San Andrés. After struggling with a life-threatening illness at the tender age of three, she slowly learns that life – and people – don’t always measure up to what you’d like them to be. Even with comfortable living arrangements, multiple college degrees, and high paying jobs, Jones fought with the nagging feeling that there was always something more out there just beyond her reach. And ‘one more degree’ or ‘one more accomplishment’ didn’t get her any closer to that elusive happiness. Enduring emotional and psychological abuse from man after man, she finds the acceptance and love she so badly craved from angels and other spirit guides as well as within herself before leaving this life in the most unusual of ways.

“While I Was Learning to Become God” would be a fascinating read for those interested in inner discovery, miracles, angels, and finding the divine within. There are some very minor editing errors and I thought the major sections should have had some smaller breakdowns – something more pronounced than simply starting a new page with no indication of time past or new location. I would have also loved to see some pictures of Vaughan through the years – to put a face with the story; I’m guessing that the young girl on the cover is her but it isn’t clear if the picture is of her or of the author. The story flowed well so I have no complaints.

“While I Was Learning to Become God” is a heartbreaking read from beginning to end as Vaughan obviously endured a lifetime of sadness. Jones’ narration is both passionate and reflective of her subject’s frustration and agony. I especially like how Jones intermingles her own recounting with quotes from Vaughan herself, as indicated in italics. This gave a nice switch in voice and brought a deeply personal feel to the text. Jones also succeeds in conveying intense emotion to her readers; I sympathized with Vaughan and felt a connection to her the same way I’d feel about a friend falling back into a bad relationship over and over again. While I do not share the same beliefs as Vaughan and had a hard time accepting some of the experiences she describes, I could still respect her desperate need for an outside entity’s love and acceptance and her use of supernatural beings to help guide her way. In the end, Sybil Vaughan found the peace she ached for and made a profound impact on Roxana Jones’ life.