



# Seldom Disappointed: A Memoir

*Tony Hillerman*

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When Tony Hillerman looks back at seventy-six years spent getting from hardtimes farm boy to bestselling author, he sees lots of evidence that Providence was poking him along. For example, when an absentminded Army clerk left him off the hospital ship taking the wounded home from France, the mishap put him on a collision course with a curing ceremony held for two Navajo Marines, thereby providing the grist for a writing career that now sees his books published in sixteen languages around the world and often on bestseller lists. Or, for example, when his agent told him his first novel was so bad that it would hurt both of their reputations, he nonetheless sent it to an editor, and that editor happened to like the Navajo stuff.

In this wry and whimsical memoir, Hillerman offers frequent backward glances at where he found ideas for plots of his books and the characters that inhabit them. He takes us with him to death row, where he interviews a man about to die in the gas chamber and details how this murderer became Colton Wolf in one of his novels. He relates how flushing a solitary heron from a sandbar caused him to convert Joe Leaphorn from husband to widower, and how his self-confessed bias against the social elite solved the key plot problem in *A Thief of Time*.

No child abuse stories here: The worst Hillerman can recall is being sent off to first grade (in a boarding school for Indian girls) clad in cute blue coveralls instead of the manly overalls his farm-boy peers all wore. Instead we get a good-natured trip through hard times in college; an infantry career in which he "rose twice to Private First Class" and also won a Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Purple Heart; and, afterward, work as a truck driver, chain dragger, journalist, professor, and "doer of undignified deeds" for two university presidents. All this is colored by a love affair (now in its fifty-fourth year) with Marie, which involved raising six children, most of them adopted. Using the gifts of a talented novelist and reporter, seventy-six-year-old Tony Hillerman draws a brilliant portrait not just of his life but of the world around him.

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