



Whiskey Breakfast: My Swedish Family, My American Life

Richard C. Lindberg

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Chicago in the 1920s: Clark Street was the city's last Swedetown, a narrow corridor of weather-beaten storefronts, coal yards, and taverns running along the north side of the city and the locus of Swedish community life in Chicago during the first half of the twentieth century. It represented a way station for a generation of working-class immigrants escaping the hardships of the old country for the promise of a brighter new day in a halfway house of sorts, perched between the old and new lands. For Richard C. Lindberg, whose Swedish immigrant parents and grandparents settled there, it was also the staging ground for an intensely personal, multigenerational, coming-of-age drama based on the struggles of two disparate families—their dreams and their depravities, their victories and their failures.

Whiskey Breakfast is Lindberg's captivating tale of life as a first-generation baby-boomer Swedish American, caught between the customs of a land he had never been to and the desire to conform and fit into a troubled existence, tragically scarred by alcoholism, divorce, and peer abuse. But it is also a powerful and intimate portrait of his immigrant ancestors, and especially of his father, Oscar—a contractor and master builder who helped develop Chicago's post-World War II suburbs. A paradoxical man, known to some as a socialist, an anarchist, and a serious drinker, Oscar would carry with him to the grave a sixty-two-year-old family secret, a secret that for Lindberg lies at the very heart of the great Swedish unrest that drove his father and countless other men and women out of Sweden and onward to America.

Masterfully blending autobiography with immigrant history, *Whiskey Breakfast* surrounds Lindberg's family story with Swedish cultural history and politics, as well as remarkable Chicago history and how Clark Street and Swedetown became, and in many ways remain, a center of Swedish immigrants' social and cultural life. Far from a eulogy for an idealized past, Lindberg has crafted a moving and sobering memoir of a young man's struggle to come to terms with his father and himself, his immigrant heritage, and his native home.

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