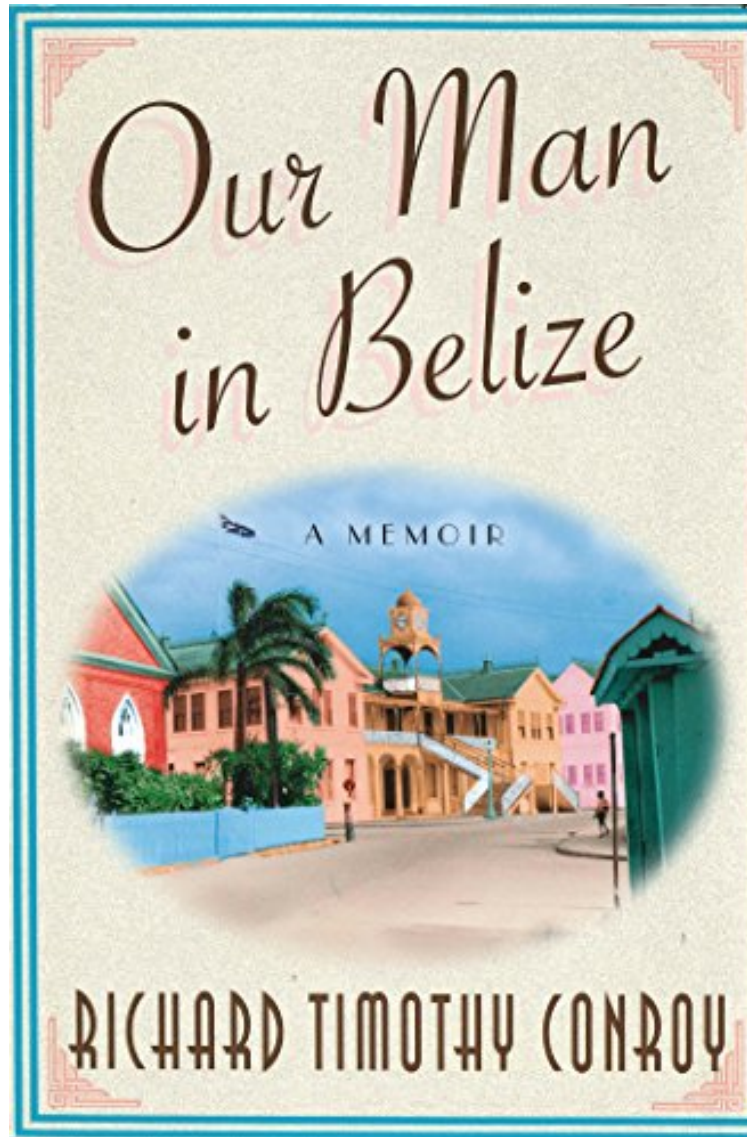


(Read free) Our Man in Belize: A Memoir

Our Man in Belize: A Memoir

Von Richard Timothy Conroy
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Von Richard Timothy Conroy : Our Man in Belize: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Our Man in Belize: A Memoir:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich.
Delightful recreation of British Honduras daysVon Lan the Answer ManOur Man in Belize is the story of Belize before satellite TV, before tourism, and before crack.In 1959, Richard Timothy Conroy, something of state department misfit, was posted as U.S. vice consul to British Honduras, a lowly job in one of the backwaters of the diplomatic

world. Two years later, one of the worst hurricanes of the century would strike an unprepared Belize. Out of this mixture of colonialism and disaster, Conroy builds an entertaining, fanciful memoir of life when the driving was still on the left. Or, as likely as not, in the middle. The just-arrived vice consul recounts a trip into the Belize City of 40 years ago: "The car crunched over the land crabs that had crawled onto the road to enjoy the last heat of the day ... The two-mile drive into Belize along Princess Margaret Drive was a drive into another century. Out at the racetrack, the few houses, for all their bleak shabbiness, had a cheap modern look. A failed subdivision on the edge of an abandoned town in a small country with unsupportable pretensions The old part of Belize presented, as we entered, a certain harmony of man, dog, and environment. Even shabby charm ... But the big difference was the number of inhabitants in the streets. The desolation that had so marked the new settlements was replaced by a town teeming with life, on foot, paw, and bicycle as well as rooted in the salty ground." Conroy quotes U.S. state department reports of the time that the country has "a road going west, and a road going north; both going nowhere." He reports, too, that except for the Fort George Hotel, Government House, and a few houses in the British section which had piped-in water, most of the city collected its water in cisterns "with the occasional rat or cat for body and flavor." He tells of some of Belize's great eccentrics: "Paddy," who would filch the American consulate's copy of *The New York Times*, and then, after removing all his clothes to wash them in the sea, would sit naked on the public seawall reading *The Times* while his clothes dried. And of "Bugger," a chess-playing Polish physician who always wanted to go to Africa, so when offered a position in Belize City, he quickly accepted, learning only after he was half-way there that Belize wasn't in Africa. After his British Honduras post, Conroy did a tour in Vienna, then left the state department for the Smithsonian Institution. Happily for us, Conroy's time in government work didn't ruin his knack for a good story. He's published three mystery novels and can tell a tale with the best of them. Witness: The sedate dinner party when giant roaches, attracted by the candlelight, drop from the ceiling into the gazpacho, or the story of a fool-proof method for stopping the cook from stealing your scotch. That these stories have, as the author admits, taken on a life of their own, are perhaps as much fantasy as fact, does not at all detract. Such recasting of reality, however, is likely behind Conroy's irritating and otherwise unexplainable habit of changing the names of nearly everybody, and even of some cities and countries, long after most of these people are gone and the events forgotten. Some old Belize hands, including those who knew him personally, take exception to Conroy's tales. It is not, after all, always a flattering memoir. He tells of the petty stupidities of the U.S. government and of the bunglings of both the British and the local Creole establishments, albeit disguising the identities of the participants. Conroy revels in juicy and unflattering gossip. He reports, for example, the story of the long-time Belize City department store owner who, after getting a nice settlement from the insurance company on losses from Hurricane Hattie and the looting afterwards, piled his Rover full of cash and drove north to the Mexican border, outrunning a customs inspector on a bicycle and violating British currency exchange regulations then in force. More significantly, Conroy also could be faulted for focusing on the details, however amusing, of personal discomforts and calamities caused by Hurricane Hattie, rather than on the human tragedy the hurricane caused. Hattie struck on the night before Halloween 1961, killing more than 400 Belizeans and destroying much of Belize City. Conroy gives short shrift to the misery of homeless Belizeans in the shacks of Hattieville (which Conroy misidentifies as the site of Belmopan, the new capital) yet lightheartedly claims that after Hurricane Hattie young girls in Belize stopped wearing underwear, in a primordial reproductive reaction to a natural disaster. With an irreverent nod, however, to Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* and a wave to the captivating scoundrels of *In the Garden of Good and Evil*, Conroy's is the kind of memoir which, to paraphrase William Powell as Nick Charles in *Shadow of the Thin Man*, we enjoy no other kind than. Conroy says he has not been back to Belize since 1963 and proposes that today's Belize he would not even recognize. He suggests that Hurricane Hattie may have been, as it were, a watershed in Belize's history, the turning point from the old colonial backwater past to self-government and a move to a new order of politics and business on a wider stage. The final laugh of this memorable memoir, this one on Vice Consul Conroy himself, may be that the Belize of the 1950s, with its entertaining eccentrics, bordellos, heavy drinkers, comic politicians, inept diplomats, dope airstrips in the bush, auto-theft rings, and port thieves, is not that much different from the Belize of 1998.

Kurzbeschreibung A settlement established by shipwrecked English sailors in 1683, Belize is now a country of wildlife refuges and spectacular snorkeling reefs. Conroy vividly and hilariously recounts his adventures in a very different Belize. Conroy admits in *Our Man in Belize* that his tales "have taken on a life of their own"--tales of disasters, for example, like the dinner party at which an Obeah witch doctor blew up the consulate oven, causing the suddenly bald cook to quit in mid-meal, and the equally unsettling occasion when huge tropical roaches, attracted by the gracious candlelight, plunged helplessly from the ceiling into the guests' bowls of gazpacho. He describes the unorthodox social mores of the town, whose bordello was a barely hidden enterprise of the town's most respectable citizen, and he brings to vivid life the charming Belize people and their ways. Conroy also recounts the tragedy of Hurricane Hattie, which killed four hundred people on Halloween Eve in 1961 and changed the Belize way of life forever. None of the cheerful

chaos and disorganization was what Conroy expected when he arrived in this small Central American country with his wife and two daughters, to face some of the most bizarre experiences of day-to-day diplomatic life. Kurzbeschreibung A settlement established by shipwrecked English sailors in 1683, Belize is now a country of wildlife refuges and spectacular snorkeling reefs. Conroy vividly and hilariously recounts his adventures in a very different Belize. Conroy admits in *Our Man in Belize* that his tales "have taken on a life of their own"--tales of disasters, for example, like the dinner party at which an Obeah witch doctor blew up the consulate oven, causing the suddenly bald cook to quit in mid-meal, and the equally unsettling occasion when huge tropical roaches, attracted by the gracious candlelight, plunged helplessly from the ceiling into the guests' bowls of gazpacho. He describes the unorthodox social mores of the town, whose bordello was a barely hidden enterprise of the town's most respectable citizen, and he brings to vivid life the charming Belize people and their ways. Conroy also recounts the tragedy of Hurricane Hattie, which killed four hundred people on Halloween Eve in 1961 and changed the Belize way of life forever. None of the cheerful chaos and disorganization was what Conroy expected when he arrived in this small Central American country with his wife and two daughters, to face some of the most bizarre experiences of day-to-day diplomatic life.