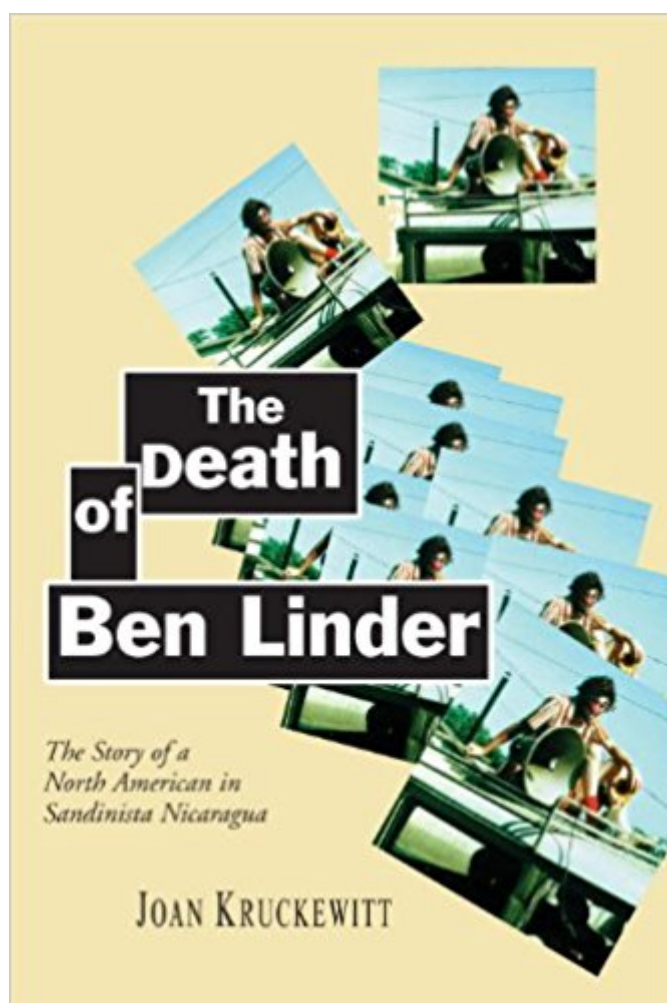


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The Death Of Ben Linder; The Story Of A North American In Sandinista Nicaragua



Synopsis

In 1987, the death of Ben Linder, the first American killed by President Reagan's "freedom fighters" -- the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan Contras -- ignited a firestorm of protest and debate. In this landmark first biography of Linder, investigative journalist Joan Kruckewitt tells his story. In the summer of 1983, a 23-year-old American named Ben Linder arrived in Managua with a unicycle and a newly earned degree in engineering. In 1986, Linder moved from Managua to El CuÃfÃ, a village in the Nicaraguan war zone, where he helped form a team to build a hydroplant to bring electricity to the town. He was ambushed and killed by the Contras the following year while surveying a stream for a possible hydroplant. In 1993, Kruckewitt traveled to the Nicaraguan mountains to investigate Linder's death. In July 1995, she finally located and interviewed one of the men who killed Ben Linder, a story that became the basis for a New Yorker feature on Linder's death. Linder's story is a portrait of one idealist who died for his beliefs, as well as a picture of a failed foreign policy, vividly exposing the true dimensions of a war that forever marked the lives of both Nicaraguans and Americans.

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Customer Reviews

Some deaths in war are unmistakably heroic, sacrifices for the greater good. Some are merely sacrifices, and whatever good comes from them happens years later, when the events surrounding them have been all but forgotten. Such was the case with the death of Ben Linder, a young American engineer who, fired by ideals of social justice, volunteered to aid the Sandinista revolution

that overthrew the corrupt dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua in 1979. Ben Linder arrived in Nicaragua four years later, where he worked to build a hydroelectric dam that would bring electrical power to the remote northern highlands. As journalist Joan Kruckewitt observes in *The Death of Ben Linder*, "Nicaragua was to leftists throughout the world in the 1980s what Spain was to progressive Americans in the 1930s," a place where a popular revolution might for once bring peace and even happiness to the downtrodden. Officials in the administration of President Ronald Reagan viewed the matter quite differently, however; Reagan once remarked, seriously, that Nicaraguan tanks were only three days' drive from the American border--yet another Communist threat that lay too close to be countenanced. Linder was murdered by counterrevolutionaries--the Contras--in 1987, almost certainly with the foreknowledge and perhaps even tacit approval of American intelligence officials. Kruckewitt draws on recently declassified CIA documents and her own field reporting to discover why Linder--and why Sandinista Nicaragua--should have been perceived as being such a threat. She paints a sympathetic portrait of young Linder, too, who, even though idealistic, seems not to have been naive; he recognized that he was in danger, but he pressed on, anyway, to do his part for the revolution, helping build a dam that now provides electricity to former Sandinistas and Contras alike. --Gregory McNamee

JOAN KRUCKEWITT is a journalist who lived in Nicaragua from 1983-1991 and covered the war between the Sandinistas and the U.S.-backed Contras for ABC Radio. She reported from Latin America and Europe for various radio networks (Pacifica, RKO, Mutual, NBC, Monitorradio, Canadian Broadcasting Company, National Public Radio) and newspapers. Kruckewitt lives in Northern California.

Excellent coverage of this important story in American history. The book reads like a movie: full of interesting characters and high stakes. Who doesn't love a protagonist who juggles on a unicycle?

A vivid description of a young American's idealistic determination to bring to a Nicaraguan village electricity created by a hydroelectric source in a flowing stream. Worshipped by families and government officials, he worked valiantly and continuously at his task only to be killed by contra military personnel. An important documentary. .

For all you people that are labling Ben: I went to engineering school with Ben and talked to him nearly daily. He was just a normal guy, but with the confidence to be just a little bit different than the

rest of us and ride a unicycle to class. :)He had no political agenda. He simply had the desire to make people smile and make a difference. It is a shame that he was wasted this way.

This book contains page after page of detailed accounts of attacks by the U.S.-bought-and-paid-for FDN-Contras, which can ONLY be described as terrorism: military assaults on agricultural co-ops (with loss of men, women & children and burning of health centers and private homes); assassinations and kidnapping of health workers and teachers (mostly women), as they walk from village to village in the Segovia Mountains; public-transport buses hitting land mines; and dynamiting of food caches and fuel caches. I would like to hear a Reagan fan dispute the veracity of these accounts!So the U.S. is currently locked into its own "War On Terrorism", while the new "Sec. Def." of the U.S., Robert Gates, played a major role in sponsorship of terrorism, as he was deeply involved in the Iran-Contra affair.Ben Linder and his great internationalist cohorts, especially Don Macleay (a genius) and Mira Brown, are real heroes.And how many times in the U.S. press do you read that Ortega "has renounced his Marxist-Leninst" past? Well, the Sandinistas always advocated a mixed economy and did indeed hold a fair election in 1984. Which is why such an individual as Reagan ever gained popularity- because of the lies that are spread about.So, I highly recommend this book as a great source for knowing what it was like to be on the ground in the Segovia Mtns. during Reagan's War.

If you are one of the many people who risked their lives when they traveled to Central America during the 1980's this book is for you! If you missed that experience but want to know what would motivate someone to risk their lives for peace and social justice by going to Nicaragua and participating in the revolution then, this book is for you!During the 1980's U.S. foreign policy in Central America was driven by an obsessive effort to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas had overthrown a dictator and were developing a society that put people before profits. They set up free health care, carried out a massive literacy campaign, and gave land to small farmers.This threat of "a good example" was countered by the U.S. which created a mercenary army (the Contras) who set out to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. Tactics included killing teachers, destroying health clinics, and forcing the Sandinistas to spend more and more of their resources on the military.Ben Linder was an engineer from Portland who put his life on the line to support the people of Nicaragua. Ben was also a clown and often put on his red nose and clown make-up to juggle and unicycle in poor neighborhoods, where children had never seen a clown. He worked in a small rural village in Northern Nicaragua, maybe 30 miles from my communities sister

city of Telpaneca, near the Honduran border. Like the Fresnan's who built a school in Telpaneca during the Contra War, Ben was working on a hydroelectric project trying in a positive way to support the revolution. THE DEATH OF BEN LINDER, THE STORY OF A NORTH AMERICAN IN SANDINISTA NICARAGUA is an insightful book that reminds us why people are willing to put their lives on the line for a cause they believe in. It shows the tragic results of U.S. foreign policy that seeks to make the world safe for corporations seeking to maximize profits.

An incredible book. Through an amazing amount of research, personal interviews, and journals, the author paints a vivid portrait of life in 80s Nicaragua, as well as the life of Ben Linder. Linder, a young American, writes (in his journals) movingly and powerfully about the desire to help a country ravaged by US funded contras, and the complexities of making life choices about work, love, and which fights to fight. His life, all too short, comes alive in Kruckewitt's excellent and very readable - although heartbreaking in - book. Highly recommended.

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