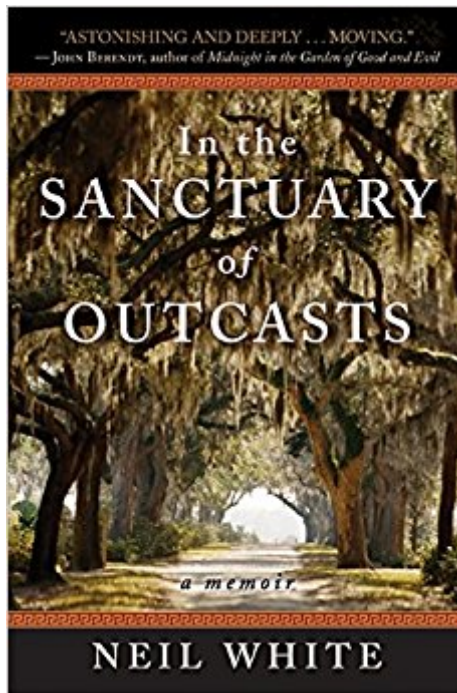


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In The Sanctuary Of Outcasts: A Memoir



Synopsis

"A remarkable story of a young man's loss of everything he deemed important, and his ultimate discovery that redemption can be taught by society's most dreaded outcasts." â John Grisham
"Hilarious, astonishing, and deeply moving." â John Berendt, author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*
The emotional, incredible true story of Neil White, a man who discovers the secret to happiness, leading a fulfilling life, and the importance of fatherhood in the most unlikely of placesâthe last leper colony in the continental United States. In the words of Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Olen Butler (*A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*), White is â a splendid writer,â and *In the Sanctuary of Outcasts* â a book that will endure.â •

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Customer Reviews

An educated white collar family man ends up a convicted criminal because of criminal behavior...Sadly, this is hardly remarkable. When said man ends up in a federal prison inside the United States first and last national leprosarium, The Carville Federal Medical Facility, well, it is not only remarkable, but quite unbelievable. The life of Neil White took just such a turn and "In the Sanctuary of Outcasts" chronicles that journey. Sometimes, truth is stranger than fiction. Neil White was guilty before he ever had a criminal lapse. Guilty of idealism, arrogance, and materialism all of which, unbridled, fatally clouded his judgment. In the end those traits, and a few others, contributed to not one, but two collapsed businesses-each involving criminal activity - the last being of such a magnitude prosecution was guaranteed. So the real journey begins when Neil's father drops him off

at what he assumes is a minimum security federal penitentiary. When Neil realizes he is among the last segregated group of Americans with leprosy he feels as if he has stepped into a nightmare. Locked down among criminals in a leper colony and made to do menial labor for outcasts so isolated they literally no longer exist in the world Neil knew. Plus, he is surrounded by an odd assortment of criminals, which he is now one, who have been deemed of less value than lepers. Could it get worse? It did as Neil soon learned his wife was dissolving their marriage. Somehow through all of this Neil must seek to mend his own broken self and find redemption of his past and a meaningful path for his future. In all of the darkness outlined above there lies a truly remarkable story. As things formerly held so dear are removed, Neil begins to see that which really does hold meaning.

"In the Sanctuary of Outcasts" is Neil White's bittersweet memoir about serving time in Carville Prison in the late 1990s. Carville prison was no ordinary, white-collar penitentiary; it was also the last leprosarium ("leper colony") in the United States. Sentenced for kiting checks, White has to overcome the humiliation of his conviction, guilt for betraying friends and family, his crumbling marriage, and his initial revulsion of the patients suffering from leprosy. Quite surprisingly, White finds a certain solace in this place. Although he initially believes that he is a cut above the other inmates, he realizes that he has far more in common with his fellow convicts than he previously believed. He also develops close relationships with the leprosy patients who help him through the hard times and whose inner strength give White the courage to look inside himself and the courage to ask for forgiveness. White is able to convey his story effectively. He evocatively describes his life at Carville and the reader has no difficulty imagining what it was like to be there. He describes his fellow inmates and the patients with leprosy with compassion, humor, and dignity. He convincingly tells us how his time in prison transformed him, how he becomes a better person because of this experience. White is a storyteller. He doesn't dwell on the philosophical. His revelations come through stories and we are able to see White through his own eyes and through his interactions with his fellow inmates, the patients, and his family. This makes the book as easy to read as it is meaningful. One caveat, of course, is that the book is written solely from White's point of view.

Aside from the fact that I had never heard of Carville, nor that I didn't even know that the country had a leper colony, this book isn't really chock full of any new revelations. White did a good job of describing his surroundings and his feelings about his incarceration. What I haven't been able to figure out is how the idea of mixing inmates in with civilians ever got started. Nor do I understand

how the "patients" would have agreed, in speaking with quite a few of them, their feelings were made known plainly about how they didn't like the living situation and how they wished the author and the other prisoners were elsewhere. It motivates me to do some research on my own. While not really a journal of his time there, this book serves more as an insightful journey in just what it means to be comfortable in your own skin, what is important, and why we care so much about what others think about us in return. White met some interesting characters and even more interesting prisoners in his stay at Carville some 10+ years ago. If you are looking for an expose of the penal system and judicial misdoings, move along. This book isn't written that way. If you happen to be looking for a moral tale, a book about friendship, redemption, and forgiveness, then this one will work for you. I have half a mind to head out to Carville for a vacation to see this historic property (it is now a museum) and a great sadness at not having had the pleasure of ever getting to meet Ella, a wonderful character and if half as interesting in real life as she was on paper, a remarkable human being as well. Not a stellar entry into literature, but not a waste of time either, this book is charming, easy to read, and intriguing.

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