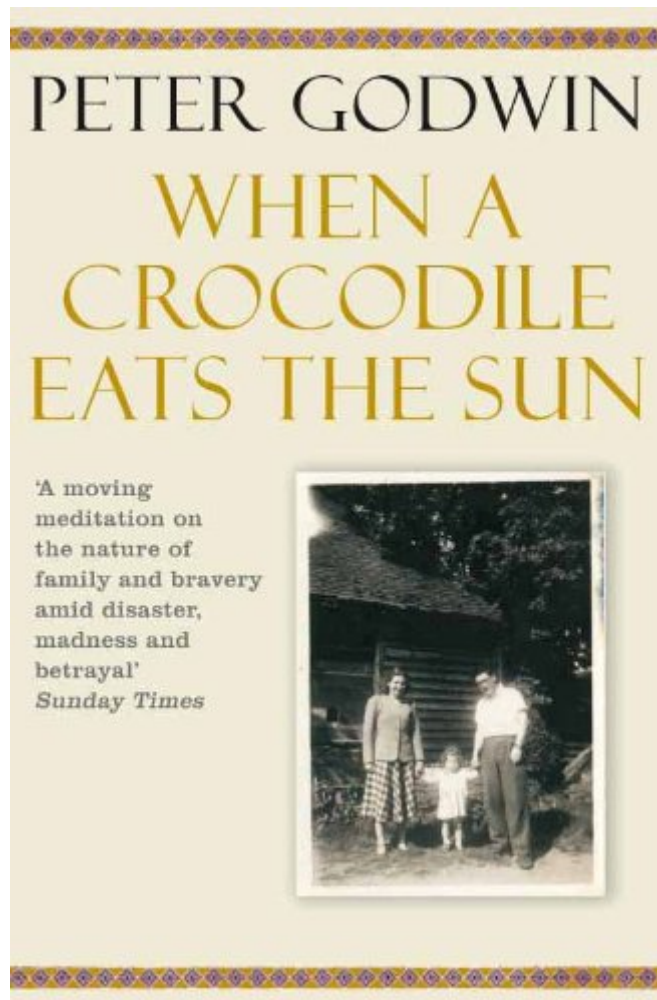




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When A Crocodile Eats The Sun



Synopsis

Peter Godwin, an award-winning writer, is on assignment in Zululand when he is summoned by his mother to Zimbabwe, his birthplace. His father is seriously ill; she fears he is dying. Godwin finds his country, once a post-colonial success story, descending into a vortex of violence and racial hatred. His father recovers, but over the next few years Godwin travels regularly between his family life in Manhattan and the increasing chaos of Zimbabwe, with its rampant inflation and land seizures making famine a very real prospect. It is against this backdrop that Godwin discovers a fifty-year-old family secret, one which changes everything he thought he knew about his father, and his own place in the world. Peter Godwin's book combines vivid reportage, moving personal stories and revealing memoir, and traces his family's quest to belong in hostile lands – a quest that spans three continents and half a century. –Heartbreaking . . . Godwin plainly loves Africa, and he captures the baffling wayward contradictions of its people, their cruelties and unexpected kindnesses, their nobility of spirit in the face of appalling conditions, with humour and grace – Daily Mail – A wonderful book . . . beautifully written, packed with insight and free of rancour – Literary Review – A strong, heroic book . . . too vivid to bear and too central to our concerns to ignore – Edmund White

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Customer Reviews

I'm not sure how to rate this book. It appeared to me at once a biographical about the depressing early years of an independent Zimbabwe; on the other hand, it devolved into a most personal autobiography. I am torn. I lived in Rhodesia from 1962 through 1969 with a year in Zambia sandwiched in between. I was not raised in Rhodesia but did spend nearly six of my formative years in Tanganyika. Before moving to Rhodesia as a young man I did a six months' stint in Blantyre, Malawi, staying at Ryalls Hotel (not Riley's as misprinted,) and have mixed feelings. From a literary perspective, Godwin's writing style is creative, exotic and stimulating although the 'stimulating' part, which tends negative, was a bit much for me having lived in the country in happier times. Coming events however, were indeed casting their shadows before them in the 60s. So, I harbor little doubt that the impression he leaves is accurate. I made a flying visit to Harare, (Salisbury) in 1985 and saw the downhill trend with my own eyes. A former Shona servant of mine whom I contacted bemoaned the terrible situation and avowed how much better life had been under white rule. And Mugabe was just getting started. If you knew Rhodesia, reading this book will leave you impressed and distressed. If you didn't, you may regard the story with a more objective eye although it's hard to believe anyone could be objective about this international disgrace. Well worth the read if you can handle it.

The Slope of Kongwa Hill:
A Boy's Tale of Africa

"When a Crocodile Eats the Sun" is a magnificent memoir. It is, in my mind, the best book I have read for some years. At varying times, it can be tragic, uplifting, sad and captivating. I simply devoured it over a handful of days. Peter Godwin was born in Rhodesia, a country to which his parents emigrated after the Second World War. His mother was a doctor and his father an engineer. They were seeking a fresh start in Africa. Their hopes would have been boundless. Godwin's memoir covers the period from 1996 until 2004. It is a period in which his father's health is progressively declining and ultimately leads to his death. This decline is a metaphor for the tragedy that is modern Zimbabwe. From having been part of the nation's educated elite, Godwin's family is slowly reduced to penury. The nation is ruled by an authoritarian kleptocrat, Robert Mugabe. Single handedly, this man has run Zimbabwe down from a relatively prosperous nation with good prospects to being a beggar. One can only hope that history treats this man with the contempt that is his due. Godwin tells the story of the nation's decline through the eyes of a foreigner who now only

visits the country periodically. He has moved to New York where he is a writer. On each trip home he sees a nation one step closer to anarchy. This in itself is a sad tale but when seen against the backdrop of his own father's failing health, the tale is especially tragic. Intertwined with the larger picture is a slowly revealing portrait of his father's background which had been kept secret from his children. This too is a sad story. Some people are truly dogged by the misfortunes of when and where they were born. This is certainly true for Godwin senior. I will say no more. Arguably, I have revealed too much already. However, I do thoroughly recommend this book. It is a masterpiece of compelling literature.

Peter Godwin's book - *When A Crocodile Eats the Sun* is a book many can equate to as many of us from Southern Africa have struggled to discover our own past whatever our persuasion. I for one was born in Southern Africa, lived in the CAF (Central African Federation) - Federation of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland now (Malawi) and have witnessed the *Wind of Change* that swept through Africa and in many ways still is. No matter what side of the equation one sits, to read Peter's book *When A Crocodile Eats the Sun* clearly puts things into perspective, as one may recall one's own very similar experiences shedding a genuine tear of grief whilst others may weep crocodile tears.

In *"When A Crocodile Eats The Sun"*, Peter Godwin shares an intimate and deeply personal account of Zimbabwe's societal and economic collapse under Mugabe's rule. In episodes of varying length and separation, we glimpse Zimbabwe's decline through Godwin's visits home, where everyday life gradually becomes a struggle for his family and friends. In handling matters both mundane and profound, this memoir reads as a sincere telling of this melancholy chapter in history. The decline and eventual death of Godwin's father is the painful personal narrative that parallels the death of the nation he once knew. The frustration and futility of the author's experiences are all the more poignant for the private moments shared with the reader.

A great read about important events and times. A really enlightening tale which examined generally known happenings in a very detailed and shocking context. The human factors in the story were so very well done and the sense of dismay and waste palpable. Not only was the history of racial conflict and colonisation done well but also the analysis of the effects upon and reactions of, the protagonists was outstanding and set many aspects into a widely universal experience of

endurance, suffering, loyalty and resistance to the point of ultimate loss.

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