

### *Desert Journey*

Dr. Jerry Burgener

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Reviewed by Ron Standerfer for Reader Views (5/08)

The basic premise of Jerry Burgener's well-written and moving book, "Desert Journey," is this: A middle-aged man, battered by a series of failed relationships and filled with self-doubt, decides to take a couple of months off and travel to the American Southwest. Once there, he plans to do very little but ride his horse, enjoy the breathtaking scenery of the Superstition Mountains, and maybe---just maybe---sort out the issues that had been plaguing his life. But destiny had something different in mind for him, and what was waiting for him in those mountains, was the start of a profound, mystical journey of self-discovery, facilitated by a wise and ageless Indian who soon became his mentor and spiritual advisor.

Seeking spiritual guidance and self-discovery from within the Native American shamanistic culture is not a new concept, of course. Carlos Castaneda explored that paradigm brilliantly in the 1960s with his series of writings based on "The Teachings of Don Juan." But there is something about Burgener's approach that is more---how shall I put this---peaceful, than the frenetic, peyote-induced rituals described in Castaneda's writings.

The thing I liked the most about "Desert Journey" is how quickly Burgener's journey became my journey. Thanks to his talented and descriptive writing, I could feel the warm nuzzle of his horse on my arm, smell the crisp, clean desert air, savor the sight of the multi-hued canyon walls changing with the light, and hear the sharp "screech" of a hawk flying overhead. I also found myself reading and rereading many of the passages in the book trying to divine the deeper wisdom buried within. One of my favorite sayings was, "dreams are powerful tools for us to use to connect with other worlds." This is a new and refreshing idea to me as I had always thought dreams were tools for exploring our subconscious, a place I have no desire to visit!

The only part of "Desert Journey" that did not totally fulfill my expectations was the ending. I expected the story to rise to a crescendo and finish with some kind of profound proclamation summarizing what the journey had really been all about. Instead, the author loads his horse into the trailer and heads back to Illinois. But then again, that's what life is all about, isn't it? Every time we reach the summit we discover that we are only on a plateau, and there is more climbing to be done.

"Desert Journey" is written in the first person singular and I am assuming the narrator, "Jerry," is in fact the author. On the other hand, the book is listed as fiction and is described as a novel, so I could be wrong. I hope I'm not though, because there are a million questions I want to ask Jerry Burgener as one Illinois boy to another. Meanwhile, "Desert Journey" is an excellent book and I strongly recommend it. Be forewarned, however, that if you do read it you may be tempted to take your own spiritual journey. I know I am.