



The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe

Douglas Rogers

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Thrilling, heartbreak, and, at times, absurdly funny, *The Last Resort* is a remarkable true story about one family in a country under siege and a testament to the love, perseverance, and resilience of the human spirit.

Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Douglas Rogers is the son of white farmers living through that country's long and tense transition from postcolonial rule. He escaped the dull future mapped out for him by his parents for one of adventure and excitement in Europe and the United States. But when Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe launched his violent program to reclaim white-owned land and Rogers's parents were caught in the cross fire, everything changed. Lyn and Ros, the owners of Drifters—a famous game farm and backpacker lodge in the eastern mountains that was one of the most popular budget resorts in the country—found their home and resort under siege, their friends and neighbors expelled, and their lives in danger. But instead of leaving, as their son pleads with them to do, they haul out a shotgun and decide to stay.

On returning to the country of his birth, Rogers finds his once orderly and progressive home transformed into something resembling a Marx Brothers romp crossed with *Heart of Darkness*: pot has supplanted maize in the fields; hookers have replaced college kids as guests; and soldiers, spies, and teenage diamond dealers guzzle beer at the bar.

And yet, in spite of it all, Rogers's parents—with the help of friends, farmworkers, lodge guests, and residents—among them black political dissidents and white refugee farmers—continue to hold on. But can they survive to the end?

In the midst of a nation stuck between its stubborn past and an impatient future, Rogers soon begins to see his parents in a new light: unbowed, with passions and purpose renewed, even heroic. And, in the process, he learns that the "big story" he had relentlessly pursued his entire adult life as a roving journalist and travel writer was actually happening in his own backyard.

The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe Details

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From Reader Review The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe for online ebook

Angela says

The Last Resort is a whirlwind tour through eight years of Zimbabwe's descent from forced evictions of white farmers into the election chaos of 2008. The author visits his parents each year as they adapt to a changing country and struggle to hold onto their small backpacker hotel, Drifter's Inn, in the countryside. Their white farmer neighbors have been kicked out of their homes (some eventually taking refuge at the Inn's cabins), tourism has dried up, and Drifter's is inadvertently reimagined as, in turns, a weekend getaway for upperclass black Zimbabweans to take their second wives and mistresses (and ladies of the night), a refugee camp for dispossessed white farmers waiting for their paperwork to clear for resettlement abroad, a diamond smugglers' party oasis, and a hiding place for their newly elected MDC MPs as the election violence rages.

The story told is as riveting as it is improbable, and the author's view of the action is kept lighthearted enough to highlight the absurdity of it all: the customers who go to the bank to take out their money to buy something, only to discover upon their return that the price has doubled. The measurement of the real exchange rate by asking someone on the street the cost of 7 eggs. The many characters we meet along the way, all thrown together in a struggle just to survive: a pro-ZANU soldier with a dodgy history and high government connections, the mysterious nephew of a top minister who turns the Drifter's bar around and brings in the nouveau riche diamond trading clientele, the diamond traders themselves, awash in wealth they can't save, and Rogers's stubborn, determined parents making it work. Along the way the reader learns a lot of the post-colonial history of Zimbabwe and a more nuanced view of the political situation, including the historical injustices that have created today's political and economic landscape, than is usually presented.

The main flaws in this book are that it's a memoir and necessarily focuses on the times that Rogers is actually in Zimbabwe. When it comes time to leave after his visits, we don't want to fly back to New York with his wife, kid, running water, stocked store shelves, and consistent electricity: we want to stay and hang out with his more interesting 70-year-old parents. Also, when's that *Recipes for Disaster: Adventures in the Kitchen of a Failed State* cookbook coming out? That's what I want to read.

Avril Vandermerwe says

An eye-opening account of life in Zimbabwe under Mugabe's government.

Pramudith Rupasinghe says

Wonderful book, I loved it

Petra Eggs says

The truth is often more harrowing than anything written as fiction, because fiction necessarily has to have a plot and work to a conclusion and in order to maintain tension (and not to bore the reader) the minutiae of a long-drawn out horrific experience cannot be written.

This book is about the recent modern times in rural Zimbabwe for whites in business in a small way. These whites have seen that Mugabe did good things - he was a teacher and brought literacy to the blacks freed from the appalling oppression of Ian Smith's white regime. They have also seen his impetus for improvement change to an overweening desire to maintain himself as supremely powerful and because of the consequent paranoia, divide the country much for the worse.

The author's parents aren't racist or elitist and regard themselves as thoroughly African and fear being deprived of their land and livelihood, if not their lives. They fear this as whites and as voters for the non-Mugabe party in the last election, rigged as usual. They are rescued in the most brilliant twist ever. Better than any fiction, but also chilling, how one person could take over the lives of others slowly, by stealth and without their permission and have them grateful forever for that even when they realise what has happened. I don't want to spoil it by writing any details. No writer of plots with cunning endings ever thought up anything half so good.

Brilliant book, really worth reading.

Kari says

Riveting. Only wish I had read it before my visit to Zimbabwe, so that I could have discussed some of the content with the friends I met there. It has only fueled my interest to learn more.

Becky says

Dramatic and real accounting of the decline of Zimbabwe and the tenacity of the Rogers, white farmers who struggle to hold on to their home. The story is told through their son, Douglas Rogers, who grew up in Zimbabwe. If you have read and enjoyed Peter Godwin's story of growing up in Zimbabwe in the book "Mukiwa" and then the bittersweet story of seeing the country his grew up in and love fall about in the book "When the Crocodile Ate the Son", also by Peter Godwin, you will also enjoy "The Last Resort". Living within the safety and relative security of the U.S., it can be hard to imagine living in your home and knowing there will be the inevitable knock at the door and rebel thugs will kick you out without any compensation or redress. Yet that is exactly how the Rogers' lived after Mugabe took over the government. The book is passionately written, as only one who has an emotional tie to the story can do. The people and landscape are richly detailed and the events within the book are both comic and tragic. I loved this book and highly recommend it.

david says

Stunning.

To know now that I knew so little about Zimbabwe is nothing short of shameful. To know now that Mugabe still rules there, a decade after this true tale was written, is alarming. Westerners hear what they are sold and we can go on about Syria, Venezuela, N. Korea, Yemen and other hotspots that make the news.

But that Zimbabwe still exists as it did, and is still subjugated to Mugabe as it has been for so long, is further proof that good and evil coexist and it will always be this way. We are only impotent and temporary audience members watching the world as it will always be until it becomes our time to leave.

As for you, Old man Mugabe, with your billions of dollars in ready assets, and at ninety-two years old, maybe share a million or two here and there with your dehydrated, famished and impoverished nation. What are you saving it for? Central air conditioning in Hell?

And how do you sleep at night? You piece of___.

Jim says

Zimbabwe is an excellent example of what happens when a group of countries stick their collective nose in another nation's affairs. Back in the day the breakaway state of Rhodesia was a flawed but functioning entity. It's true that there was an uneven distribution of wealth, with whites generally more wealthy than blacks, but this would not have been a permanent state. The western press naturally had to sensationalize the situation, because that's how you get subscribers...there is no money to be made by reporting that things are getting better. So Rhodesia was sanctioned to death by countries that should have known better. Elections were held at a time when the people were just not ready...the result being that the country, while nominally a democracy, is actually a functioning dictatorship run by a madman. Tens of thousands have been murdered, thousands have had their property taken without compensation, and the Zimbabwean currency is deflated to the point that a suitcase is now called a "Zimbabwean wallet."

Mr Rogers' book will take you into a remote area of this nuthouse state where his parents have managed to hang on to their backpacking and tourist resort, once a flourishing business but now at risk of appropriation by any "veteran" (former communist-backed guerilla) who can convince the state to give it to him. It is a very engaging tale of resilience, of survival and of adaptation to rapidly changing circumstances. The reader will probably find that the Zimbabwean situation has been very selectively reported...few know, for example, that black farmers can also be evicted from their lands if they are suspected of not supporting the current "democratic" regime. If you go by what the western media reported, you would probably be surprised to learn that there was such a thing as a black farmer in Zimbabwe. You will also learn that, when an eviction occurs, the people who were employed on the farm are usually also out of work, resulting in a large population of unemployed people with really nowhere to go.

Rogers will also introduce you to a salty cast of characters, survivors, hanging on to what was theirs when any rational person would have thrown in the towel. You change and adapt: work for an NGO, become a black market dealer in goods or currency, turn your resort into a brothel. There is no racism here, just people of varying races helping each other out and looking out for each other in the face of the excesses of a lunatic and non-functioning government.

My only criticism of this book is that it has no photographs: surely Rogers must have a few shots of the resort and the principal characters that he could have included to augment the narrative. Otherwise, this is the best book I've read this year.

John says

This is an excellent book about extraordinary people living through unbelievable times in Zimbabwe. Over the last few years I have read a number of novels set in that country in the post independence period which have been deeply moving in their depiction of the evolution of that country and the effect on the lives of its people; but none of them delivered their story with the power of this one.

It is well written in a journalistic style as opposed to a literary one, which is not meant to demean it in any way, because the clarity of the writing brings home the mixture of horror, humour and fact. There were times when I was incredulous at the inhumanity of the government and their supporters as well as at the combination of stoicism, pragmatism and bravery shown by the writer's parents, their staff, friends and associates.

It is described as a travel book, but in reality it is a very personal history which I think should be essential reading for anyone interested in either sub-Saharan Africa or post colonialism.

As I reached the epilogue my mind flicked across to The Eagles' song "The Last Resort", so I looked up the lyrics and, although I don't think that Douglas Rogers had in mind when he titled the book, I was surprised by its relevance.

I picked up this book not knowing what to expect. I urge others to try it for themselves.

Keith says

I'm of the opinion that most Americans, even those that consider themselves somewhat knowledgeable about current events and well-read, know very little about modern sub-Saharan Africa. Most of us are aware of the continent's subjugation to colonial rule and that revolutionary changes have taken place there in recent decades but the sub-division of territories and mélange of unpronounceable names and ever changing leaders seldom moves us below the headlines. The fact that many whites may have lost their superior racial status as well as property leaves us sanguine that it was undoubtedly deserved. This memoir about a white farm family in Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, gave me an entirely new perspective. As part of the historical viewpoint, many of the whites were descendants of families that had immigrated there in the early 1600's and considered themselves, not Dutch or British or even white, but Zimbabwean first. They've known nothing else. This is a breathtaking story of adaptation and survival, not only by the author's family, but by the poverty stricken black populace caught up in a whirlwind of political and cultural upheaval and technological change. This personal account may find you taking sides and cheering on individuals as they are introduced and then being amazed, amused and sometimes horrified at the outcome of events. Yes, I said amused. Some of the events are as surprisingly hilarious as the characters are amazingly heroic and there are lessons here for complacent people everywhere.

Laura says

From BBC radio 4 - Book of the Week:

The Last Resort by Douglas Rogers read by Jack Klaff. Abridged and produced by Jane Marshall Productions. The author tells the story of his parents fight to stay on their backpacker lodge in Zimbabwe despite the political upheaval of the last decade. When he hears the news of the death of the first white

farmer, Rogers is concerned for his parents safety but when he returns home to visit them, nothing has prepared him for what he finds.

Sequelguerrier says

Quite a few books have been written in recent years by exiled children of white Zimbabweans. Many if not all, whether they claim to be autobiographical or not are heavily influence by the feelings of the writer about his lost home country and what is happening there. Some find it impossible to jump over the shadow of bitterness to even attempt a balanced view. That is definitely not the case here. I'm not going to repeat the blurb or the descriptions of many others what this book is about. It's about a son discovering his parents and about the son of a country rediscovering his homeland and its people having lived afar for years.

Having lived in Zimbabwe recently for a good three years and become friends with some Zimbabweans of all colours and political inclinations, I have to say The Last Resort, like no other book I have read manages to capture just how extraordinary Zimbabwe and the Zimbabweans are. More than any of the serious treatises and analysis, it manages to give a feel of what living the past few years in Zimbabwe WAS like and how people lived with it. It shows the heart break, the violence, the sheer craziness and the resilience and "we'll-make-a-plan-spirit" that is for so much in the frankly surprising recovery that has started operating almost as soon as the far from safe or perfect ZANU-PF&MDC Government came into being. That same spirit borne of a deep attachment to the country made you feel hopeful in the middle of the deepest crisis when political violence ripped at the social fabric and a crazy inflation destroyed the last of the economy. Throughout it all, Zimbabweans, even those who left, never lost the love for this wonderful piece of earth. There is bitterness, of course there is. But there is also a common, old-fashioned decency that manages to reassert itself in the middle of the worst excesses. It's the same spirit and decency that pervades 'The Last Resort' together with a huge affection for land and people and which rang such an immediate bell with me. Reading it at times horrified at times laughing, I thought: 'This is so right, so true'.

Hana says

Zimbabwe "An edgy, roller-coaster adventure, it is also a story about how to survive a corrupt Third World dictatorship with a little innovation, humor, bribery, and brothel management."

Kyle says

I came across this book while reading the New Yorker's Book Bench blog and after reading the interview with the author I couldn't resist, though I can't say I had much interest or knowledge about Zimbabwe.

This book blew me away. I learned so much about the history and culture of Zimbabwe, while being kept on the edge of my seat. To make a long story short, the dictator of Zimbabwe, in an attempt to hide his own incompetence on his country's economic problems decides that the white minority in Zimbabwe will make a convenient scapegoat. Laws are enacted that take away homes/farms from the white population. This book details the saga of the Rogers' parents trying to keep their home and land. Originally a tourist resort, the Rogers are forced into all sorts of crazy adventures when the tourists disappear and corrupt government officials move in next door. The Rogers' resort turns into a brothel with a marijuana plantation, and later, a gathering place for Blood Diamond trading.

Through it all the Rogers ability to remain hopeful is inspiring. I hope one day his Mom's proposed cookbook gets published. This book is a page turner... every time you turn one you think this is when they lose their house, so you have to keep flipping.

Alesa says

Back in 1998, I hired a guy to build a road onto a 40-acre plot I owned in Eastern Washington. He was a fascinating fellow. He and his wife were saving to buy more land in Zimbabwe, a place they loved. I was shocked. Having spent some rather gnarly years in Jamaica during white flight, and benefiting from what something similar did to real estate prices in the Virgin Islands, I was rather dubious. But he assured me that Zimbabwe was very friendly towards white land owners. He and his wife were creating their dream farm.

I always wondered what happened to them. Well, after reading *The Last Resort*, I know. This is one humdinger of a book, especially since it's true. Travel writer Douglas Rogers grew up in Zimbabwe, and his parents still live there. They ran a backpackers lodge, and Rogers tells the story of his visits home over the years -- as things got increasingly horrific for whites. The lodge eventually turned into a haunt of prostitutes and illegal diamond traders. Most of the neighbors were evicted, kidnapped, tortured or killed. You can't help admiring his parents for their amazing courage (or is it unwillingness to see danger?).

This is not one of those books that glorifies the colonial days. Rather, it explains the complicated history of blacks and whites in Zimbabwe, and the growing pains of a country trying to establish itself. I learned so much! And Rogers is one heck of a writer. You can practically taste the air and feel the grit of the dust. And he's honest, too. You end up feeling like you've made a good friend by the time you're done. And you want to go visit Drifters yourself, his parents' ill-fated "resort."
