Minada America

Documentary Review

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by Tommye-K. Mayer
PrincetGallison Press–USA, 1996
ISBN: 0-9652805-0-0
reviewed by Veronica Wrightman [ Mine Action Information Center ]

A ppilying her own life experience to One-Handed in a Two-Handed World, author Tommye-K. Mayer provides readers with a plethora of advice on how to handle everyday life single-handedly. Offering chapter topics ranging from household maintenance and repairs to office work and sports, this personal guidebook aims to cover all. Mayer opens the book with a personal narrative describing her experience with single-handedness. She describes the mental ups and downs she struggled to overcome. She then offers insight into achieving a positive mindset, reassuring the reader that there are ways to regain self-sufficiency, self-reliance and self-esteem.

One-Handed in a Two-Handed World stresses three secrets that Mayer has classified as the most critical in successfully managing life single-handedly. The first tool to master is body positioning. Body positioning is basically figuring out how to use your body to accomplish what you want. This feat may require some reorganizing of the limbs as they are in a position that benefits you the most. The next secret Mayer reveals to the reader involves many helpful gadgets that are available to help single-handed people. She provides a few suggestions on which ones she regards as indispensable.

The remaining 214 pages are full of invaluable advice on how to achieve the tasks that were once thought of as easy and routine, requiring little or no thought. The chapter called “Personal Care” addresses the very basics of taking care of your body by yourself. “Office Work,” Mayer’s chapter on how to work around the office single-handedly, is particularly informative and useful. It includes a section dedicated to providing helpful hints on signing your name, and a very detailed and instructive section on the computer and all of its components. Mayer acknowledges that a potential employer might be skeptical that a single-handed person is capable of being an asset to the company in a position working with computers. The section on computers provides tips on maneuvering single-handedly, accurately, dispelling that skepticism. In addition, it supplies information on getting to know the basics of the hardware and all of the applications you need to know to be productive with the machine you will be operating.

The strength of this book makes it an easy-to-navigate manual, allowing readers to find the information promptly. It is a reasonable size, so if needed, it can be stowed in a tote bag or in the car, for on-the-spot help. One-Handed in a Two-Handed World is a must-have for those who have lost an arm or hand, those who have lost the use of an arm or hand and those who care about someone in either circumstance. This book would be good reading material to have available in rehabilitation centers, mental health clinics and physicians’ offices.

Minada America

by Vinicius Souza and Maria Eugênia Sá
MediaQuatro, 2007
http://mediaquatro.sites.uol.com.br
reviewed by Joshua Karber [ Mine Action Information Center ]

M inada America, produced by photojournalists Vinicius Souza and Maria Eugênia Sá, is a book and film package documenting the lives of Latin Americans devastated by landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Damaged by the lack of media attention to the problem of landmines and ERW, the producers’ main goal is to expose the problem to a world that is largely oblivious to the tragedies they cause.

The book consists of revealing photographs that reveal an untold aftermath of war. It is a compilation of over 50 pictures and biographies of landmine victims. The photographs themselves are straightforward and heartfelt in their portrayal of the victims and depict the struggles of their subjects without commentary. Souza and Sá are real and honest in their documentation—a story that exposes the reader to the true-impact of ERW.

Making a book like Minada America is a difficult task because the photographers run the risk of being too forceful in their presentation. All too often journalists get caught up in their own emotions and abuse photographic techniques to prove points about their cause. The result ends up a loss: The documentary is not just criticized for being too preachy; it’s criticized for losing sight of its goal. However, these photojournalists dodge the bullet gracefully. In Minada America there is no artistic manipulation. Instead, the photographs take candid, genuine shots that let their subjects convey the message.

The documentary film provides rich background information and is a perfect complement to the book because it takes the reader deeper into a topic that has already caught his or her interest. It provides more insight into the stories depicted and mixes them with history, opinion and raw facts on the topic of mine action. The details are not only revealing but disturbing. The film explains that the existence of ERW continues to haunt regions of Central America and South America, including the Caribbean. Even more disturbing is that landmines and ERW cause a total of 1,100 casualties every year in Colombia alone. That’s over three a day.

The information provided in the film is its best asset, but the surrogate interviews lend extra insight into how the victims of an explosive remnant of war affects a person’s life. For instance, the interview with Olinda Giron, a survivor who was blinded and physically mutilated by a piece of ERW, is particularly powerful. She discusses her recovery and hopes for the future, and, despite her setbacks, she still believes she can become something in this world. The interview with Claudia Gallaga, a 12-year-old girl who lost her father in a blast, is also heart-wrenching.

On the other hand, Minada America might be powerful and moving, but it is definitely not without its blemishes. The film has a few problems that are distracting. It was produced in Spanish with subtitles. The viewer can choose subtitles in Portuguese or English. However, the subtitles are shown quickly, making it frequently hard to understand what is being said. Adding to this problem is a loud, discordant soundtrack that hurts an otherwise dramatic ending.

Overall, the approach and revealing nature of Minada America are what make it so effective. The greatest thing about the package is the way it blends an approachable presentation with expert commentary and analysis. The photographs capture beautifully the everyday lives of people affected by a not-so-everyday incident. Although the film has some minor flaws, viewers won’t have a hard time looking past the production blunders and appreciating it for the humanist value it provides.

Joshua Karber joined the Mine Action Information Center staff as an Editorial Assistant for the JMA in September 2007. He previously transferred from Occidental College, in Los Angeles, California, to James Madison University. He is an English major and has written for his high school and college publications.

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