



Digging for Truth: One Man's Epic Adventure Exploring the World's Greatest Archaeological Mystery

Tonya Parker Morrison
December 14, 2006

You know you're addicted to a show when, without prior warning, your friends and family automatically know not to call while it's on. Such is the case with The History Channel's enthralling series Digging for the Truth.

When I heard host Josh Bernstein would actually write a book detailing his adventures when the camera wasn't rolling, I was naturally excited. I was also feeling a bit cocky.

I have seen every single episode of the show and most of them more than once. When I'm out and someone is talking about one of the stories I've done on the show, I usually only need a few clues to guess which episode they are needling me about. It's like my own little trivia game.

That's because I've found it easy to become engrossed in the show from the very beginning. Sometime at the end of the first season, I happened upon a rerun and that, as they say, was that.

I passed around a box of first season videos to schools all over the area in the hopes that Bernstein's congenial manner and non-condescending narration would make history – dare I say it – cool – for the future diggers and scientists among their unassuming ranks. Thankfully, it worked.

The first test subjects - the kids at my daughter's elementary school - were delighted to see a likeable guy cutting up on screen spontaneously and doing things like exploring pyramids and diving into the depths of the Mayan underworld. DFT was a new world to them, a mammoth, epic, colorful world that went far beyond their classrooms and Midwestern homes.

Other than a few slightly awkward moments blushing over the scientific name of a certain mummy's male body parts, getting the kids into DFT was a no-brainer. (Well, it's not like they SHOWED the body part, for Pete's sakes!) Bernstein brings a sense of enthusiasm and a certain gusto to every show, obviously fully aware that we are all living vicariously through him. It's like GQ meets Bill Nye.

So, when he told me that he signed a publishing deal, I wasn't surprised one bit. I'd seen a sneak peek of the behind-the-scenes action and I knew it was well worth the effort to get it all down on paper.

When he informed me he would do it while promoting season two and then, filming season three, I was impressed, but still not that surprised. Bernstein is, after all, the ultimate multi-tasker.

What did ultimately surprise me was the quality of the end result. And that's saying a lot considering I did my absolute best to read it without bias, as if I had no idea who Bernstein was or what DFT was. It was akin to watching a blockbuster movie sequel without screening the original first – if it could stand on its own merit, then it was a great book; if not, then I'd have to come up with a polite way to say it wasn't my cup of Kool-Aid.

Luckily, I don't have to break out that thesaurus because I genuinely like the book. Here's why (in no particular order):

- 1) Bernstein took most of the pictures in the book himself (those that he didn't take are credited in the back of the book). Other than the fact that he's a fantastic photographer, it was nice to see the world from his point of view. What he felt was important enough to take pictures of tells us a lot about who he is.
- 2) I didn't think it was possible (and you know you didn't either), but there are things in the book that were not in the two very in depth, verbose articles I have done on Bernstein. I discovered new things about Bernstein's life and world, just as every other reader of the book will.
- 3) The tone of the book is open, honest and not the least bit "Hey! Look at me and my cool job!" – ish. Bernstein somehow managed to find the perfect balance between divulging intimate details of his life and telling readers things they are dying to know. It's an urbane blend of his calm reserve and natural kinetic energy in ink: like iced coffee.
- 4) He tells it like it is. He doesn't mince words when describing the more trying moments of filming, like how annoyed renowned Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities Zahi Hawass was that they'd be covering his theory that Egyptians built the pyramids, he was thrilled. He became not so thrilled when told they'd also be talking to John Van Auken, the director of the Association for Research and Enlightenment (the foundation for Edgar Cayce's research), who believes the breathtaking monuments may have been part of Atlantis or at least built by its former inhabitants. It was the show that started it all, but it could have quickly become the show that wasn't.
- 5) Bernstein brings that sense of educated, bridled awe he oozes on DFT right into his writing, but never goes overboard. There is a disciplined, intricately woven construction going on here, which makes it flow like lollygagging lava.
- 6) Even if you're not into history, you can still enjoy it. Why? Because it's as much about being Josh Bernstein – entrepreneur, CEO, survival expert, inquisitive student and inspirational teacher – as it is about those slivers of his life he spends on screen entertaining us. And what's not interesting about reading up on how a successful person who seems to fulfill every goal he has got that way?

7) He doesn't rely on others to tell the tale. Yes, he mentions everyone who is an integral part of DFT, but the text is always Bernstein's experiences and those experiences are riveting.

8) You'll learn something and it won't hurt one bit. True, scaling mountains, looking for the Holy Grail and chasing down giant sloths is like a good non-fiction action movie, but it's also educational. I like to call it edutainment. Proof that you can increase the pace of your pulse and the size of your brain at the same time, just like he does on every episode of DFT.

9) It's not a million pages long. Let's face it, if it were the literary version of Dances with Wolves, we'd have a hard time getting it all down in one gulp – or twenty.

It's a great looking book for your coffee table and the timing of the release, coincidentally, means it makes a GREAT Christmas, Kwanzaa or Hanukkah gift. Yes, displaying the slick hardback on your antique coffee table will make you look so very brainy and in-the-know when company comes calling, but it's also one that they might actually be moved to pick up and read for themselves.

So, if you're on the fence about buying a book that your action junkie superhero-lovin' brother (like mine) would consider a bit too "uppity," try selling it to him like this after he opens it:

"Yeah, the dude does extreme stuff like mountain climbing and cave diving, wrestles with snakes and sword fights!"

If that doesn't work, remind him that there is a comic book out there based on Bernstein's adventures, so technically he is a superhero – at least in ink.