



Book Review: A Race to Splendor

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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It was rather unusual in the early 1900s to find a woman with architectural training. To find two of them, therefore was indeed unique.

Amelia Hunter Bradshaw had just returned to San Francisco after graduating from an architectural course in France. Her mother had remained in France and her grandfather, who had been the owner of the Bay View hotel had died. Amelia knew that her father, who was a gambler, would not be the best person to take over operation of the hotel but was prepared to do her best to protect the beautiful building that her grandfather had treasured.

Amelia was thrilled to be hired to work with Julia Morgan, a friend from the engineering program that they had previously completed together at the University of California. Neither could have known that they would both be direct witnesses of the 1906 earthquake that would take hundreds of lives and destroy many of the buildings in the city of San Francisco.

The damage and destruction were horrendous. Besides losing the Bay View, Amelia was saddened to find that her father had died during a poker game in which he had wagered the Bay View. J.D. Thayer, owner of the gambling den, stated that he had won the Bay View and even when Amelia took him to court about this, he was declared the owner. Amelia was devastated to lose her grandfather, her father and the hotel that she had loved since childhood.

After the earthquake, there was a lot to be done to restore the city of San Francisco. As a result of plot twists and turns, Julia was contracted to restore the Fairmont Hotel and Amelia was assigned the task of rebuilding the Bay View hotel. Their work became a competition to see which would be reopened by the one year anniversary date of the earthquake.

At first, J.D. Thayer seemed to be Amelia's enemy. Over time, however, they realized that their goals were the same and they both committed to doing whatever was necessary to achieve them.

The author has also included several sub-plots that involve colourful characters and interesting situations that could have or probably did occur around the time of the earthquake. These make the story even more appealing.

"A Race to Splendor" is a beautiful book that combines true historical facts surrounding the 1906 earthquake with fictional characters who have strong roles and display believable traits. Although the work appears to be focused on rebuilding physical structures after an environmental disaster, the story also shows how lives of the individuals involved were rebuilt.

Ciji Ware is a good writer who captures the attention of the reader through her vivid description of the times as well as the "humanness" of the characters involved. She intertwines fact with fiction in a manner that made me at times believe that the story actually could have really occurred.

I enjoyed this book so much that I am looking forward to reading more of her works.

A very good read!