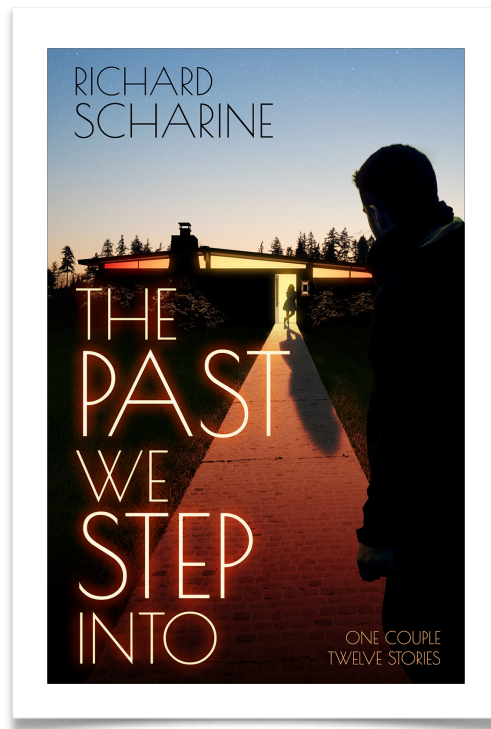




“Book Review: *The Past We Step Into*”

Reviewed by Audrey Davis



A tender-hearted collection of growth and self-discovery

The Past We Step Into follows a man and his wife as they navigate the highs and lows of the changing American landscape from the 1950s onward. Author Richard Scharine does a wonderful job of weaving this tale around socially dominating events, mixing fact with fiction from different viewpoints to show how they affect our protagonists and those important to them.



Multiple events are mentioned more than once, like the Vietnam War. The overlap, brief descriptions, and date stamps from integrated article headlines give readers a chance to reflect on the events and how they truly affect the characters.

Beginning with his Irish and Polish ancestors and Norwegian Great Aunt Alma, Rickart Temple, the protagonist, is brought to life and molded into the man he is, for better or for worse. This gives readers the opportunity to see how past decisions can alter decisions made for the future, and how those decisions stay with you, positively or negatively.

Rickart illustrates how the landscape, both physical and political, has transformed through the years, by taking his children to places he grew up visiting, or coming to terms with the fact that as a veteran, he is to accept anti-war activism from his wife and daughter, who is exposed to integrated marches and anti-war rallies from a young age.

As a professor, Rik watches his students struggle with the same landscape in their own ways and with their own added hardships. After one class, he leaves his students with the warning that their ***“leaders may be more concerned with their own welfare than yours. Right and wrong may not be determined by local values, but personal danger may be.”*** Scharine does not censor life’s gritty realities— sex, child-rearing, death, violence, and the mess that comes with all of it.

This overarching, interlinked narrative is served well as a collection of short stories as opposed to a novel. The individual stories work well on their own, and although the timeline of the primary narrative is a little scattered, it all eventually connects at the same ending point.

At times the pacing is a little slow-moving, but it never comes to a halt, and it doesn’t detract from the story— such is life, slow at times, yet always moving forward, full of emotion. It’s refreshing to see how much the protagonist cares for his wife and family and how much of an impact they have on him.

This collection feels akin to a coming-of-age novel. It provides an opportune window into past events that many know about, but some may not grasp the extent to which they occurred. There is a healthy balance of happiness, grief, and the desire to do the right thing,



and each character is memorable with their own part to play. Ultimately, the reader is left with the message that life moves on perpetually and you're only left to live with your past, as you use it to propel you through your future.

**“Being American is more than a pride we inherit.
It's The Past We Step Into and how we repair it.”**

—Amanda Gorman