

## A Path to Reconciliation

Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths by Bruce Feiler

Book Review by Pam Sugarman (L, '01)

Reading the book Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths by Bruce Feiler gave me an opportunity to re-live a bit of my METS experience. Like our essays about the METS trip, the book is part travelogue, part transcript, and part personal reflection. It is based on the premise that Abraham is the shared ancestor of Jews, Christians and Muslims and therefore may have something to teach us about how the world's three large monotheistic religions can get along. It's worth a read.

The travelogue is based on Feiler's trip after September 11 to places where Abraham lived, some of which were spots we probably would not have gone at the time. The transcripts are reports of his conversations with prominent, thoughtful Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders. The personal reflection is on how his study of Abraham fit with his own beliefs and those of the people he met. This approach is similar to that of his other best-selling book Walking the Bible: A Journey By Land Through the Five Books Of Moses, which I took with me on our METS trip and also recommend to you.

The author explains that there is not one Abraham we must get to know, or even three, one for each religion, but one or more for each generation from the last 2500 years. Any student of theology would know this, but it was interesting to trace the evolution.

To be honest, I found the original text-based explanations of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael a little slow, but it wouldn't be for someone who has more experience with the subject than I do, (and that's nearly all of the readers of this newsletter!) The book really grabbed my attention once the author began to explain the Jewish, Christian and Muslim interpretations of Abraham over time and the implications for our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I enjoyed the beginning, and by the middle I couldn't wait to finish it.

In the conclusion, Feiler addresses the question "Can the religions get along?" and points out the importance of Abraham to interfaith dialogue. He says, "...the leaders of the interfaith conversation realized they needed more than just mandates and dictums. They needed a common source. They needed a foundation that all three traditions revered equally, that embodied the monotheistic ideals of faith in God and righteous behavior toward humanity, and that existed before the religions themselves existed. They needed Abraham."

I attended a book signing party with the author in Atlanta last fall. He told two stories about how the book was being received. First, he said that one purpose in writing it was to spark dialogue. When the book was first published, he had hoped at least one person in each state would organize an interfaith salon, where readers could talk about their personal connection to Abraham and see what they could learn from the discussion. He wrote a guide for readers to use at the salons and was very excited that instead of 50 people being interested, 2000 people had downloaded the guide from the website [www.brucefeiler.com](http://www.brucefeiler.com).

Second, some of you may have been in attendance when the author met at Columbia Theological Seminary with students from a Jewish, a Christian and a Muslim day school in Atlanta. It was designed as a morning presentation followed by conversation over lunch. During the planning, it came out that the event would be held during Ramadan, so the Muslim students would be fasting at lunchtime. Without any prompting from the adults, the Jewish and Christian students decided to fast as a show of solidarity. For Feiler, this was another example that Abraham can be a path to reconciliation.