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Blue-Eyed Boy: A Memoir

Robert Timberg

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Acclaimed journalist Robert Timberg's extraordinary, long-awaited memoir of his struggle to reclaim his life and find his calling after being severely burned as a young Marine lieutenant in Vietnam

In January 1967, Robert Timberg was a short-timer, counting down the days until his combat tour ended. He had thirteen days to go before he got to go back home to his wife in Southern California. That homecoming would eventually happen, but not in thirteen days, and not as the person he once was. The moment his vehicle struck a Vietcong land mine divided his life into before and after.

He survived, barely, with third-degree burns over his face and much of his body. It would have been easy to give up. Instead, Robert Timberg began an arduous and uncertain struggle back—not just to physical recovery, but to a life of meaning. Remarkable as his return to health was—he endured thirty-five operations, one without anesthesia—just as remarkable was his decision to reinvent himself as a journalist and enter one of the most public of professions. *Blue-Eyed Boy* is a gripping, occasionally comic account of what it took for an ambitious man, aware of his frightful appearance but hungry for meaning and accomplishment, to master a new craft amid the pitying stares and shocked reactions of many he encountered on a daily basis.

By the 1980s, Timberg had moved into the upper ranks of his profession, having secured a prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard and a job as White House correspondent for *The Baltimore Sun*. Suddenly his work brought his life full circle: the Iran-Contra scandal broke. At its heart were three fellow Naval Academy graduates and Vietnam-era veterans, Oliver North, Bud McFarlane, and John Poindexter. Timberg's coverage of that story resulted in his first book, *The Nightingale's Song*, a powerful work of narrative nonfiction that follows these three academy graduates and two others—John McCain and Jim Webb—from Annapolis through Vietnam and into the Reagan years. In *Blue-Eyed Boy*, Timberg relates how he came to know and develop a deep understanding of these five men, and how their stories helped him understand the ways the Vietnam War and the furor that swirled around it continued to haunt him, and the nation as a whole, as they still do even now, nearly four decades after its dismal conclusion.

Like others of his generation, Robert Timberg had to travel an unexpectedly hard and at times bitter road. In facing his own life with the same tools of wisdom, human empathy, and storytelling grit he has always brought to his journalism, he has produced one of the most moving and important memoirs of our time.

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