



# The Other Side of Eden: Life With John Steinbeck

*John Steinbeck IV, Nancy Steinbeck*

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As the son of a celebrated literary icon, John Steinbeck IV grew up in a privileged world peopled by the literati and the intellectual elite. Sadly, it was also a world of alcoholism, bitter divorce, estrangement, and abuse, on the part of both his mother and father. In this fascinating memoir, the late son and namesake of John Steinbeck writes with great insight and a gift for lyrical expression about his often painful youth. Left unfinished at his untimely death, this testament to his life is here reconstructed by his wife of twelve years. Interweaving her own reminiscences of her life with John Steinbeck IV, Nancy Steinbeck has created an engrossing account from two perspectives: her husband's memories of his chaotic and adventurous upbringing and her own thoughts on their journey together to make a new life apart from the long shadow of a famous father and a troubled past. Though labouring under the burden of being the son of a 20th-century legend, the younger Steinbeck established himself as a respected journalist in his own right, mainly through his writing on wartime Vietnam, which had a profound impact on his life.

"The Other Side of Eden" contains many thoughts on Vietnam, including a memorable scene of his father's visit to the war-torn country while the younger Steinbeck was in the army. There are also vivid recollections of his mother's abusive, alcoholic rages; his lonely years in boarding school; his long battle with drug addiction; his strained relationship with his remote, conflicted father; and the connection of East of Eden to Steinbeck's real-life family. Nancy Steinbeck adds important perspective as an outsider getting to know this complex family through her husband, and in the end helping him to put his life on a sound footing. Both Nancy and John, in their search for spiritual identity, were drawn to Tibetan Buddhism. Along the way they befriended a strange and fascinating collection of characters, from the Dalai Lama to William Burroughs and Abbie Hoffman. Their tale of triumph in the struggle against parental abuse, drug addiction, and the seductive trap of guru worship is a must read for all Steinbeck fans, as well as anyone who survived the sixties.

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