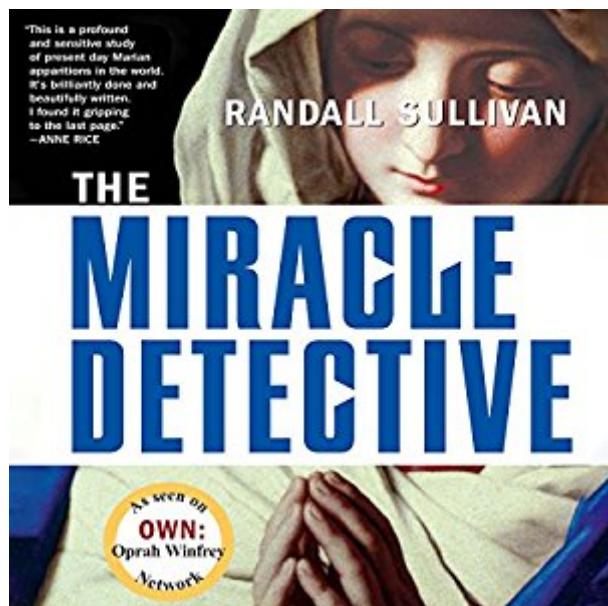


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# The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out To Examine How The Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions And Discovers His Own Faith



## Synopsis

In a tiny, dilapidated trailer in northeastern Oregon, a young woman saw a vision of the Virgin Mary in an ordinary landscape painting hanging on her bedroom wall. After being met with skepticism from the local parish, the matter was officially placed "under investigation" by the Catholic diocese. Investigative journalist Randall Sullivan wanted to know how, exactly, one might conduct the official inquiry into such an incident, so he set off to interview theologians, historians, and postulators from the Sacred Congregation of the Causes for Saints. These men, dubbed "miracle detectives" by the author, were charged by the Vatican with testing the miraculous and judging the holy. Sullivan traveled from the Vatican in Rome to the tiny village of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where six visionaries had been receiving apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Sullivan's quest turns personal and takes him to Scottsdale, Arizona, site of America's largest and most controversial instances of Virgin Mary sightings, culminating an eight-year investigation of predictions of apocalyptic events, false claims of revelation, and the search for a genuine theophany - that is, the ultimate interface between man and God.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I really enjoyed this book. Very well written and expertly researched, it was a joy to read. I found it to be a very fair and balanced account of Marian visions. The book is 90% neutral investigative journalism and 10% about the author's own spiritual journey through various phases of doubt and faith, which added a lot to the story. It's mostly centered on Medjugorje, though events in Arizona are also given a fair amount of attention. Beyond that, Lourdes and Fatima get a little time along

with a few other events. The accounts of various healings and miracles are fascinating. What I most appreciated about the book was its neutrality and easy to read style. The author is not a Bible thumper who is looking to convert the reader, nor is he an atheist attempting to disuade us. He maintains a high degree of journalistic integrity throughout, presenting the results of his in depth research and letting the reader make up his or her own mind. Was Medjugorje real? After reading this, I believe, at least in part, that it was. Though one wonders if over the years, due to basic human limitation, the seers and their Franciscan keepers have lost their way a little bit. Reading about the visions of Medjugorje in context of the past and present history of the region, was extremely educational. I don't agree with some of the criticism found at . The book is the result of 8 years of research and travel. It's a big story that covers a lot of ground and I found it to be reasonably well organized. As for the editing, the story reads very well and I didn't find virtually any typos or things of that nature. I'm not a Catholic, but after reading this book, I'm itchin' to travel to Medjugorje and do a little investigating myself. Bravo Randall Sullivan, keep up the good work!

Reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary run from the sublime (At Fatima to three Portuguese children in a pasture) to the silly (In Florida to a jewelry designer on a grilled cheese sandwich). It was news reports of a Boardman, OR Marian apparition in the winter of 1994 skewing toward the silly which first piqued Portland author Randall Sullivan's interest and sent him on a ten year journey that resulted in *The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out to Examine How the Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions and Discovers His Own Faith*. Sullivan is an investigative journalist and contributing editor at Rolling Stone magazine specializing in non-rock and roll feature stories often focusing on crime or offbeat themes with a mysterious slant. In 1994, Sullivan was neither a Catholic nor a believer in the divine but he did have the open mind of a journalist. As Sullivan sets the stage early in the book, it was the sincerity of the purported witnesses to a glowing image of the Virgin Mary in an Eastern Oregon trailer park and the fact that the incident was "under investigation" by the Diocese of Baker that induced him to look into how reported miracles were investigated by the Catholic Church. Dubbing these Church investigators "Miracle Detectives" Sullivan writes that with virtually no firsthand knowledge of the Catholic Church he naively intended to produce an account detailing the official Church process for authenticating miracles focusing on the current apparitions of the Medjugorje seers. Armed with Vatican and Medjugorje introductions supplied by Father Milan Mikulich from St. Birgitta's Parish in Portland and Father Steve Sunborg of the Oregon Curia, Sullivan began his research in Rome and Bosnia. On a superficial level, Sullivan accomplished what he set out to do. The *Miracle Detective* does feature interesting and insightful

explanations and commentary on the Church's rigorous process for looking into reported miraculous incidents. Sullivan interviewed many clerics including an Eastern Oregon parish priest, a Postulator from the Sacred Congregation of the Causes for Saints at the Vatican and others including Father Benedict Groeschel C.F.R.. Additionally, Sullivan makes a welcome contribution to the body of Medjugorje-themed literature by providing a sober and thorough review of the numerous medical and psychological studies conducted on the six seers from 1981 to the present and objectively reviews the divisive reactions to the reported apparitions among world Catholics and Yugoslav government officials alike. Also, almost unique in writing on the subject, Sullivan masterfully frames the spiritual story of Medjugorje within the broader context of Balkan history from the pagan times of late antiquity through the medieval clash between Christianity and Islam, Communism and perhaps most importantly the Bosnian war of the 1990's. Although the Church's study of events in Medjugorje was intended to be the focus of the book, it ultimately serves, as one element in a shotgun blast of a story that at times reads like a gripping detective thriller at others like a history text but ultimately becomes a moving faith journey, as the authors own experiences take center stage. Many people have traveled to Medjugorje and claim to return changed. Unexpectedly and despite his impeccable popular culture credentials, Randall Sullivan spends much of the book detailing the peaks and valleys of his own conversion story. Beginning with an incident in the Purple Room at Powell's bookstore in Portland to his arrival in the Bosnian village, a brush with evil in a Roman piazza and finally circling back to an update on events in Boardman, Sullivan's unlikely story of coming to terms with God is at times fascinating, frustrating and uplifting. In some ways, Sullivan's tale is reminiscent of *The Seven Story Mountain* by Thomas Merton. Although he is now remembered as a great spiritual sage, the young Merton outlined in his first book was also a thoroughly secular young man busy listening to jazz records and getting kicked out of college. It was only slowly and through the gift of grace that he refashioned his focus and became the man we remember. If the conversion story detailed in *The Seven Story Mountain* is told more gracefully than *The Miracle Detective* it is perhaps because Merton wrote from the benefit of hindsight while Sullivan admits to remaining in the thick of his. *The Miracle Detective* is difficult to categorize, it is at once a survey of modern era Marian apparitions and a detailed summary of the major events and personalities that make up the Medjugorje story to date. Mostly it is the personal story of a man deeply immersed in American popular culture whose life takes a much-unexpected turn in response to grace. Because this book runs in so many different directions and the author freely admits his personal involvement in the subject matter compelled him to throw out the notion of journalistic objectivity, some readers may find the scattershot organization of the book lacking cohesion. I suggest it is a strength; *The Miracle*

Detective is the sprawling output of a well-educated thoroughly organized secular mind reeling from a profound experience of the divine.

Randall Sullivan spent eight years researching and examining the miraculous apparitions at Boardman Oregon, Scottsdale Arizona and Medjugorje in Bosnia. The results is one of the best books on the phenomenon of miraculous apparitions ever to be written. Although he starts locally with Boardman, he spends most of his time in Medjugorje and Rome. Medjugorje is undeniably the most important miraculous appearance of our time and is often compared to those at Lourdes and Fatima. Sullivan provides wonderfully balanced reporting, while at the same time he is open enough to show how his interviews have personally influenced him. He does a wonderful job of presenting the many points of view on these events, yet is always reaching for the objective truth behind the presentations of the seers, the Church, the theologians, the believers, and the scientists. My favorite chapter comes towards the end of the book when he interviews Father Benedict Groeschel. He quotes Groeschel as saying: "If you no more than dismiss these things, you're simple an obscurantist. If you mindlessly embrace them, you're just a dope. we have to resist the obsessive-compulsive demand for a clear, definitive answer to these questions. This is a field for people who don't have to have it all figured out, who don't need it cast in black and white. There's a lotta gray mist around this stuff, and you have to be prepared to deal with that. Once in a while a bright, shining light comes through, and we should be grateful for it. Because the rest of the time we have to feel our way through the twilight." If you have an open mind, I recommend this book. However, if you come to it to either prove or disprove a preconceived idea, you will probably feel upset with the author's approach.

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