

GOOD READING

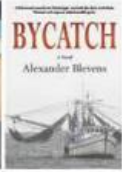
Not every piece of fiction has foundations in Christian spirituality. In his debut novel, *Bycatch* (TouchPoint Press, 2022), Alexander (Alex) Blevens of Ocean Springs successfully navigates fictional themes of sin, judgment, and redemption with a gritty story examining a tragic conflict between a Vietnamese shrimper, a Biloxi shrimper, and their families. The novel is readable and artfully plotted with captivating prose and no wasted words.

After the Vietnam War ended, Vietnamese refugee Don Nguyen and his family migrated to Biloxi, MS. Nguyen was a proud South Vietnamese Army officer assigned as a liaison to American troops during the war. One night he catches an American soldier, Rex Thompson, stealing money earmarked for the South Vietnamese Army. In an unexpected turn, Nguyen makes Thompson put the money back in a safe and chooses not to report the incident. Thompson returns, steals the money again, and Nguyen is disgraced. Overwhelming

guilt is not assuaged as he is assigned suicide missions and serves with honor, managing to stay alive before leaving his home country at the war's end.

Twenty years after leaving Vietnam, Nguyen discovers that Rex Thompson, by then a chronic alcoholic, and his two sons live as shrimpers trolling the same waters as Gulf waters Dom

Nguyen. Nguyen's family believes he is motivated by anger and seeks revenge against Thompson. Nguyen's wife begs her husband to forgive Thompson, but to no avail. His wife and daughter cannot break through the wall of depression that dominates Don Nguyen's life. Nguyen finds no comfort, and his life ends tragically. It would all be a



mystery if his daughter, Anh, had not discovered a treasure of truth in her father's belongings.

"The plot for *Bycatch* evolved after I set up a conflict that ordinary people would want to resolve. It surprised me when the characters found the solutions to their problem lay firmly in scripture. This reminds me that we all have the tools to deal with what life throws at us," wrote Alex Blevens, a communicant of St. John's/Ocean Springs.

Many readers will delight in the descriptions of Coast landmarks such as St. Michael's Catholic Church/Biloxi. *Bycatch* is a sensitive, realistic treatment of the struggle to bring forgiveness into the lives of all concerned and is well worth the read. *Bycatch* is available wherever books are sold.

Scott Lenoir is a retired Episcopal priest and former editor of The Mississippi Episcopalian.