

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

THE URBAN SHEPHERD *Chasing the American Dream* Ben Amor
Dog Ear

BOOK REVIEW

A native of Tunisia traces his journey to success and citizenship in the U.S., including launching the human services nonprofit Terra-Genesis, Inc., in this debut memoir.

Born in 1946, the eldest son of a farming family in Tunisia, Amor was encouraged to attain an education, leading him to vocational school and electrician certification. In this memoir, he discusses his drive in pursuing these and other goals, putting in italics his own motivational statements as well as some from author Napoleon Hill and others within this narrative. Amor shares how he first came to America via the Tunisian air force, which sent him to San Antonio, Texas, for technology and English studies. Already engaged, Amor instead married an American, brought her to Tunisia, and then returned to San Antonio with her and their daughter after his air force service ended. He earned a college degree, found work in the emerging computer industry, and divorced in 1982. Then, in 1983, he had the “dream that led me to quit my job and invest all my savings into a nonprofit agency to try to end world hunger using technology.” From near the midpoint of this memoir and onward, Amor largely focuses on detailing the activities of this agency, Terra-Genesis, which includes creating print and online directories of human support services. He also notes his joy in gaining U.S. citizenship, marrying his original fiancée, and having a son with her (all occurring in the 1990s), as well as Tunisia’s promising political changes in the last decade. The author is to be lauded for not simply enjoying his own success, but instead giving back through Terra-Genesis, with the challenges of bringing its services to Tunisia a study in political and bureaucratic frustration. His warning that nonprofits can fall into the trap of fostering dependency is honest and illuminating, particularly for any aspiring do-gooder. But Amor’s narrative struggles under the weight of discussing so many personal and professional concerns, with his estrangement from his daughter, for example, a sad, hurried mention. Still, Amor is a great case study of striving for—and achieving—individual and large-scale dreams.

An admirable saga of impressive philanthropy and self-empowerment.