

A Song for the River

Philip Connors

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Philip Connors has previously written about his many years as a fire lookout in New Mexico's Gila National Forest. His new memoir, *A Song for the River*, reflects not only on the wilderness, but also on the lives of those who are touched by it. It's a work at times sad and beautiful, at others reverent.

Much of the book focuses on the deaths of four people who loved the Gila River. A chapter set during the summer of 2014 relates the author's friendship with John, a longtime fire lookout whom Connors views as a supportive brother, and who died in a freak accident in the wilderness. Other chapters describe three promising local students, committed to studying and preserving the natural beauty around them, who died with their teacher in a small plane crash.

In all these cases, Connors pays meaningful tribute to his subjects, conveying what made their contributions special and explaining what he learned from knowing them. There's a palpable sense of loss. The book also includes reflections on the author's own life and actions, including a new relationship, a serious health scare, and other important milestones.

Vivid prose describing the Gila area is ever-present, as when smoke forms "an angry aubergine band smeared across my northern horizon like a brushstroke from the hand of a demented god." Love for the wilderness is compellingly conveyed. In moving snapshots of those touched by the Gila, *A Song for the River* shows the myriad ways that naturalists and nature touches others.

JEFF FLEISCHER (July/August 2018)

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