



Celebrating the Coyote

Barbara Waters

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Talking to rattle snakes is a lot like marriage. “The essentials are inner and outer positive communication, common sense, and respect.” In her first book, *Celebrating The Coyote*, Waters presents a journey through time and space, as well as the heart and soul. This memoir exudes communication, common sense and respect as she presents honest, insightful moments from the life she shared with her late husband Frank Waters, noted author of *The Man Who killed the Deer and Masked Gods* among others, as well as thoughts that pervade her mind after his death. Just as a rattler will shake his tail and strike unpredictably, yet with imperceptible certainty, *Celebrating The Coyote* often surprises and turns in unpredictable directions, yet moves with a certainty of purpose.

Water’s first book is more like a journal than a discourse on the life these two spirited people shared. It begins with the death of her husband; an ending that she describes as “acute grief” that “soon numbs the outside.” This is a memoir that slowly thaws the outside and warms the heart and soul like the sun in the Southwestern United States, where much of Water’s remembrances are set. Much of the genius and charm that was Frank Waters comes through here, as do many beliefs about living and the world around us. From a brief discourse on chopping wood, not as work or a chore but as an essential part of feeding the soul, to talking to rattle snakes and observing human nature, the author makes some unlikely correlations that are essential to the fabric of this work.

This book is about the process of grieving as John Nichols states in his introduction; more to the point, *Celebrating The Coyote* celebrates life, not death. The people of Barbara and Frank Water’s past and present live vibrantly in these pages. So many things can be learned or affirmed in the experiences retold and lived out in this book. It is only fitting that D.H. Lawrence, a writer who mined the many sides of emotion and the senses in his fiction and poetry, makes an appearance in *Celebrating The Coyote*. Water’s makes an insightful connection with Lawrence and his wife Frieda, who spent quite a few years living in the Southwest that both Barbara and Frank loved.

Waters explains that *k’ulel* is what the ancient Mayans called “the soul force imbuing all things.” It is often used in referring to certain sacred sites or “primordial spots of the world where one can tune into the innate energy of nature combined with a pervasive human reverence.” This idea, among a myriad of others, are present in this work, which is not unlike scattering ashes at sea as the dead and the living unite, into another spirit, filled with the excitement of the new and the comfort of the old in one.

JIM FILKINS (May / June 1999)

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