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Autobiography & Memoir

Fault Line
Laurie Alberts
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“Some damages are never wholly corrected,? writes the author. Her memoir depicts a chasm within her character as a youth-an uncontrolled urge for sex-which plunged her into the abyss of misbegotten relationships, especially with a young man named Kim.

Laurie escaped into a subset world, below ideal reality, as she wandered through the vast expanses of wilderness in Boulder. Her relationship with Kim was impromptu, tempestuous, and lacking any sense of joint purpose, resolve, or fulfillment. It contributed to the decay of her health, and predicted his demise. When she professes, later in the story that “the glittering distance of a night sky awaits you,” readers wonder if Laurie would ever see that better time of inner strength and rejuvenation.

The author, who has previously published three novels (The Price of Land in Shelby, Lost Daughters, and Tempting Fate), teaches writing in Vermont College’s M.F.A Creative Writing program. She has received the Michener Award, the Katherine Anne Porter Prize, and the American Fiction Award, among others.

This memoir is the latest in the publisher’s “American Lives” series, which features literary nonfiction about singular American experiences by such authors as Ted Kooser and Mimi Schwartz. The essence of Alberts’s writing in this book is that she is telling the truth. Her use of metaphor allows readers to sense the story’s stark reality: “After three weeks in the wilds, the riotous color of a grocery store left us dazed as though tripping.” Her descriptions evoke a sense of awe at the scenery, tempered by the rawness of Laurie’s journey of self-discovery: “Shivering, soaked, I kept on, striding through an exquisite day of puffy white clouds, crystalline air, aspens quivering in the breeze -

an unrelenting buzz of terror like a
cicada's drone filled my ears."

Alberts places her readers in the pit of a societal fault line: she sees today's image-consciousness and lack of substance as a major problem with youth in contemporary society, exemplified by Laurie's reckless affinity for sex and Kim's escape into black and blue pools of liquor. She exposes the loneliness and unhappiness of wrongful actions, prompting readers to question the degradation of their own consciousness, and to focus on the teaching of morals.

Inner conflict is contrasted to the imagery of wealthy homes and university degrees.

Despite the bleak and tragic story, this book shows hope, too. Kim became a victim of his alcoholism, but Laurie eventually healed her fault, married, and became a mother. The book's message is that worst of sinners can be
reformed if they wish, and for those unable to help themselves, there is no shame in seeking help. Laurie reached within the chasms of her soul, and crossed over her own fault line.