



Grizzlies on My Mind: Essays of Adventure, Love, and Heartache from Yellowstone Country

Michael W. Leach

WestWinds Press (May 2014)

Softcover \$18.99 (256pp)

978-0-88240-995-5

The flora and fauna of Yellowstone becomes the setting of a spiritual journey in this luscious memoir.

For seven years, the scenery of Michael W. Leach's daily commute was beyond enviable: bands of roaming bison, marauding grizzlies, charging elk, and sulking wolves that peppered stunning vistas. In *Grizzlies on My Mind: Essays of Adventure, Love, and Heartache from Yellowstone Country*, Leach delivers a beautiful tribute to the Yellowstone National Park or, as he calls it, the "spine of the continent," where he spent over a decade as a ranger, naturalist, guide, park nonprofit director, and wildlife advocate.

Written like a journal, the chapters convey Leach's rapture for Yellowstone as an iconic American landscape and one of its last truly wild frontiers. Such scenery can be as cruel as it is invigorating: it is a place "where ignorance or carelessness can help you become part of the food chain." For instance, he tells of an overly zealous amateur bear enthusiast who after being mauled by a grizzly bear is forced to walk miles back to camp holding the skin on his face in place.

Leach also regales readers with several stories of his own brushes with danger: a hormone-crazed elk who chased him through the deck of a cabin, the search for the body of a park visitor after a fatal fall, keeping park visitors at a safe distance from a grizzly and wolf having a stand-off over an elk carcass, and tumultuous snowmobile excursions.

Diagnosed with a debilitating autoimmune disorder, Leach was forced to stop his basketball career at an early age and undergo a cycle of pain intervention and other medical treatment. He credits his career as a ranger as saving his sense of self, and *Grizzlies on My Mind* is Leach's spiritual journey. An early essay describes a Native American healing ritual, and there are short essays throughout the collection in which Leach conjures animistic reverence for the park's impressive flora and fauna.

Grizzlies on My Mind has wide appeal as an intimate account of life within one of America's national treasures beyond the rocketing waters of Old Faithful. Leach's inspired prose evokes how the land and its creatures hold special powers over those lucky enough to witness them firsthand. As Leach describes, "each day spent in Yellowstone has the potential to remedy a broken heart and calm a racing mind." As evidence, he points out that any day he spends with park visitors ends in hugs rather than handshakes.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (Fall 2014)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.