

Reservation Restless

Jim Kristofic

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Jim Kristofic grew up tracking “the trail of animals while ranging in the wilderness ... where narrative intelligence started in humans.” His memoir, *Reservation Restless*, acts as another chapter in a long string of human stories.

Addressing the fraught history between white and Indigenous people, his own personal stories, and the geological features that are particular to Arizona and New Mexico, Kristofic illustrates how places, stories, and the right audience can make a man.

In 1956, the US Government flooded Glen Canyon to create Lake Powell; the land beneath it was once ranged by Anasazi, and now its petroglyphs grow ever fainter on the walls beneath the water. Kristofic learned to fish, swim, and trail animals there, amid Diné, Navajo, and Mormon kids; worked the Colorado River as a young adult, skipped prom to fish, and dreamed of heading east for college, even as he waxed poetic about the Southwest.

As Kristofic accumulates stories of saving lives and tracking mountain lions, of a blast up of a sudden wind or a river running red, a desire compels him: to relate everything to his former English teacher, who set him on the path to writing and thinking. His book becomes an act of self-discovery, vibrant with details, as of a mountain lion as a “thin, pale clump ... snagged in the sagebrush,” and of the personal path that led him Pennsylvania and beyond.

Its text full of the fervor of the converted, the book is attentive to every detail and its potential for proffering great meaning. As a character in his own story, Kristofic often speaks with a kind of formal portent, but he also acknowledges that his friends poke fun at him for the same; this awareness balances his more prophetic pronouncements.

Nimble in articulating how the problems of his ancestors, white people, and of death and stories themselves apply now, *Reservation Restless* argues that all things connect, for better or for worse.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (March / April 2020)

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