



Stories of a Forest Ranger: Tales of Life in the US Forest Service

Pete Griffin

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Stories of a Forest Ranger is an inspirational memoir about life in the US Forest Service.

In Pete Griffin's memoir *Stories of a Forest Ranger*, "friendly" wolves, mating eagles, beaver dams, fires, and promotions occasion bite-sized tales from a lifelong career.

Griffin went into the forest ranger profession to keep doing what he loved to do as a boy: explore nature, alone. As he grew older, his introverted passion for the outdoors expanded to include involvement in politics, courts, and radio. His first jobs were in his home state of Michigan. Then he took work in Alaska, where he rose in agency ranks to become a district ranger of the nation's largest national park. He now tells his forest ranger stories on cruises and through other outlets.

The first stories in the collection are from Griffin's childhood. They set a playful, curious tone. A keen observer, he gleaned conclusions by watching, in one case, a pair of eagles, who told him something about marriage. Funny stories, as with a tale about Griffin scaring his mom with baby snakes, become firm lessons that inform his beliefs and values. In one story, government reorganization leads to late paychecks, an injustice that Griffin protests by not wearing his uniform until a solution is found. At other times, he is courageous in the different way: by admitting fault, as when he misjudges a fire hazard.

Dialogue is minimal, limited to paraphrased lines based on memory. The focus is on Griffin and what he learned from his interactions with others. Other characters, including animals, are tangential presences, though they are drawn with care and respect.

The perspective is that of a bureaucrat caught between competing interests: those of environmentalists, hunters, campers, animal rights activists, and the government. Griffin is seen educating the public about the wildness of animals, even when they seem domestic, as in the case of a "friendly" wolf. In one story, an abundance of beavers leads to conflict between those who just want them gone and activists who want to save them. Griffin's novel solution is an entertaining cautionary tale.

While a ranger in uniform, Griffin is a storyteller at heart. That connecting with the audience is his priority shows in his vulnerability. He tells stories about times he was wrong or fails. His willingness to learn from his mistakes is disarming and charming. His stories are short and easy to digest, like the five-minute radio broadcasts he became known for. Exclamations, questions, and a casual tone invite reflection. Some stories are open ended, as with one in which Griffin wonders if he should forgive a coworker. The book's wisdom is teacherly, demonstrating how to learn from one's own life.

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MARI CARLSON (October 27, 2020)

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