

The River You Touch: Making a Life on Moving Water

Chris Dombrowski

Milkweed Editions (Oct 11, 2022)

Hardcover \$25.00 (336pp)

978-1-63955-063-0

Chris Dombrowski's poetic memoir *The River You Touch* captures the natural beauty and drama of Montana.

Dombrowski was nineteen when he moved from central Michigan to Missoula, Montana. He was enticed there by the writing of fellow Midwesterner Norman Mclean, as well as by the panorama of the Big Blackfoot River and the towering mountains. He writes that "the continent turned briefly on its axis and the West became my True North." After earning his MFA, he pieced together a life as a river guide, poet, writer, and teacher. He and his wife bought a home with a view of the Bitterroot Mountains, raised three children, and lived close to the land, pledging that they would "handcraft birthday presents" and never "own a minivan."

In slow, eddying prose, the memoir mines an ordinary life for evocative reflections on family, friendship, and the meaning found in a rugged landscape. It includes lengthy discourses on fly fishing, hunting for deer and pheasants, exquisite meals of game and foraged food, and the wisdom attained in "resonant quietude." It also features graceful passages about Dombrowski's float trips and lavish feasts with poet Jim Harrison. The writing is at its most compelling, though, when its lines are taut, as with Dombrowski's wistful reflections on his visits with two close friends before they died, on the anxiety of almost losing his second child, and on his conflicted feelings upon returning to northern Michigan for a year-long teaching job.

Suggesting that, like a river, a life well lived includes "headlong shots through roaring box canyons" in addition to "the hypnotic, elliptical movement of water running back on itself," *The River You Touch* is a profound, moving memoir that contemplates the earth, family, and community in its tributes to the intimate beauty of western Montana.

KRISTEN RABE (September / October 2022)

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