
Although I have seldom had the opportunity to be in what I would call a true “wilderness”, I have always enjoyed being active in the outdoors. The book title “Another Wilderness: New Outdoor Writing by Women” intrigued me and after having read the book I realized that the term “wilderness” has been interpreted in a variety of ways by the editor, Susan Fox Rogers. The wilderness adventures in this book include everything from hiking in the mountains of Nepal and skiing in the Antarctic, to writers on a farm only a few hundred yards from the major interstate and to roller bladers on the city streets in downtown San Francisco after dark.

All of the writings would fit the editor’s definition of adventure as something that takes place outdoors, where the writer explores what it means to be a woman moving, playing, or being in the outdoors. There do seem to be themes which appear repeatedly in several of the stories. The theme of caring support of other women was described well in “The Bedouins of Nevada”. I Sports believe we are seeing that theme repeated today as the all-woman team prepares to make a challenge for the America’s Cup race. Both adventures involve a team of determined women entering a sport which has been predominately male. Both groups are serving as role models for other women who will follow in their paths. The feminist influence on sport is seen in this expression of camaraderie where sport is viewed as a tool used to discover one’s self and to connect with others. This theme made me cheer for the book and the writers ability to share these positive experiences by women.

I was however disappointed by other themes I saw being repeated in many of the stories. I saw women following in what seems to be a need to dominate and control. Often there was a constant striving for new thrills, going one step further, the insatiable desire for the ultimate thrill even if that thrill might well include death. The idea of “throwing caution to the wind” to simply experience the ultimate thrill does not appeal to me if the possible consequence of that thrill is injury or death. The story, “in the Canoe Endlessly Paddling” epitomizes this theme where lack of preparedness resulted in an exciting and dangerous canoe trip. In “Looking for Daniel,” the phrase: “... nature does not negotiate” serve as a warning that preparation and understanding are needed to survive in the wilderness. Perhaps many opportunities or outdoor experiences would never have been realized without the “pioneers” who
Another Wilderness

did take those chances. But we must realize that there is a difference between facing a risk while prepared to the best of our ability and facing a risk because of lack of judgment and preparedness.

In some of the stories women were not concerned with the harmony that needs to be achieved in nature, but rather focused on their desire to conquer nature without regard to the short or long term effects of their action on nature. “Where The Bears Walk” is an example of the invasion of the sanctity of animals in nature and the attempt to humanize them. “She [the bear] looks clownish with a yellow and white tag punched into each ear and a white leather radio collar circling her neck. We have stolen something from her.” This story seems to accept the demise of the bears as humans move into the wilderness resulting in the destruction of the animal environment.

Another theme in the book is how nature, in a wilderness setting, is used in dealing with one’s own grief or loss. It is as though we are trying to return to the peaceful realm we call nature to ease our pain and look for some understanding or explanation of what has happened to us. This is evidenced in “Superior Spirit” where we find the author sea kayaking around Lake Superior after the loss of a friend to cancer. At one point after scattering the remainder of her friend’s ashes in the lake, she becomes aware of a white swan staring at her: “The trail of white dust was gone. Gone but not gone. I could feel her presence in my body like the faint stirring of spring wind.” Similarly, in “One Step At A Time” the author draws on her strength and survival skill used previously in the wilderness to deal with the impending death of her husband from a brain tumor. “Knowing I had done it once made me able to accomplish it [surviving] again”.

The collection of writings in this book certainly covers a wide range of experiences. Though all of the stories were written by women, certainly not all of the experiences described were about women. “In the Canoe Endlessly Paddling”, “Looking for Daniel” and “In the Eye of the Meadow” all seemed to focus on the man in the story. This fact both surprised and disappointed me.

Most readers will undoubtedly find some stories which are enlightening and energizing and others which strike them as senseless and disheartening, just as I did. One of the writings, “Wolf”, left me wanting to stand up and shout “Hurrah!”. And I wanted it to go further. Did her life change? Did she continue to speak up? Did she make a difference? Cheers also to “Aamaa Kidi” for its ageless tone. I found it calming and refreshing to read a story concerning a 50 year old woman who was challenging herself in the mountains of Nepal. I am sure there are countless stories on this theme just waiting to be told. Personally, I would give three stars to “Wolf”, “Aamaa Didi” and “Where “bears Walk”. On the other hand, “A City Girl Discovers the Forest seemed very disjointed. I found this story of city wilderness long and boring, and wondered why